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WOMEN AND THE REFERENDUM



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**A REFERENCE BOOK FOR CIVIC
EDUCATORS**

JANUARY 2000

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INTRODUCTION

Between 3rd June and 2nd July 2000, a referendum will be held to allow Ugandans to choose between the present no party "Movement: system, a multi-party system, or a third system which is unspecified in the Constitution." If the people of Uganda are to make a meaningful and informed choice in this referendum, then it is essential that they are provided with civic education in advance of the referendum vote. It is also essential that a comprehensive monitoring operation is undertaken to assess whether the process is conducted in line with the Referendum Act.

The Electoral Commission (EC) is responsible for coordinating and monitoring civic education prior to the referendum. A number of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have been accredited by the Electoral Commission to carry out civic education and monitoring of the referendum and it is working closely with them.

This booklet is a result of combined effort by the Civic Education and Training department of the Electoral Commission and the NGOs accredited to conduct civic education for the 2000 Referendum. The Commission appreciates the input of members of the NGOs material development committee which include Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), Action for Development (ACFODE), Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC), the National Organisation for Civic Education and Election Monitoring (NOCEM). For this particular booklet, thanks goes to Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE) and National Association of Women's Organisation in Uganda (NAWOU).

WOMEN AND THE REFERENDUM

INTRODUCTION

Women constitute more than 50% of Uganda's population but yet they are among the most marginalised in society. Because of their numbers it is very important that their role in development is recognised and their voices listened to when important decisions are taken. During the 2000 referendum, special attention should be paid to the mobilisation of women so as to enable them understand the process and participate in the elections of a political system.

This handbook is intended to facilitate civic educators to understand the special roles and needs of women in society, know when to conduct civic education, how to reach out to women and how to promote their participation in civic education.

Understanding the position of women in society

Uganda is a patriarchal society where men are the dominant players in decision making although women perform most of the reproductive, productive and community management responsibilities. For a long time women

have been denied their rights and discriminated against as a result of tradition, culture and even religion. Women have got limited access to resources, for example in some societies women may not own land, and their access to it for growing food may depend on a male relative or husband. There are high illiteracy rates among women and many do not attend literacy classes or civic education workshops because of their heavy workload, lack of extra hours or energy to take advantage of the equal opportunities. At times, their husbands deny them a chance to be involved in such activities.

Are women the same?

Civic educators should understand that no two women are alike. Women have different experiences, perspectives and needs. Therefore one cannot assume a set of universal "women's issues". Cultures, histories, locations and generations separate Ugandan women, hence civic educators should structure their information bearing in mind these differences.

The difference between women and men

Biologically men and women are different according to sex. There are distinct functions performed by women by virtue of their sex, which cannot be performed by men, for example child bearing and breast-feeding. Other differences between men and women have been socially determined; for example where as child care, producing

food and domestic work is done mostly by women, men are expected to fight wars and manage public affairs to a large extent. All these activities can be done by both men and women.

Who determines how men and women behave?

People are born female or male. They learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. They are taught by society (parents, schools, communities and the media) the appropriate behaviour and attitudes, their roles and activities and how they should relate to other people. This learned behaviour is what makes up gender identity and determines the gender roles played by men and women.

Why should women be given special consideration?

Women have been excluded or disadvantaged in the cultural, social, economic and political spheres. They have limited access to resources and political power. This restricts their ability to develop and exercise their full capabilities for their own benefit and that of society. If gender equality is to be achieved, special attention should be paid to the marginalised situation of women. For effective equality to be achieved, it is important that both men and women are brought on board.

Women's Rights are Human Rights

Human rights apply to everyone equally and no person or group of persons should deprive another individual of her or his human rights. The idea of women's human rights has been used by women to ask hard questions about the discrimination and violence they experience everyday and also to mobilise them to take collective action to promote and protect their rights.

- The Constitution of Uganda states that all persons (men and women) are equal before and under the law in all spheres of political, economic, social and cultural life.
- No person should be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, birth, tribe, religion, socio-economic standing, political opinion or disability.

How can women best protect their rights?

Women can best protect their rights if they understand them and participate in decision-making. It is therefore important that women understand Uganda's politics and participate actively in the democratic processes outlined in the Constitution. Women's participation in the referendum 2000 will enable them decide on the type of political system that will prevail in Uganda through free and fair elections.

Women and decision making

In order for true democracy, good governance and development to take place, there has to be full and equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life and at all levels of decision-making. It is important that women articulate their own needs and concerns. The specific needs of women in areas of health, education and economic activity should be put on the agenda by women **rather than by men**. Because of the increase in the number of women NGOs, women in parliament and in the local councils, issues like domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape and defilement, have come to public notice as violation of human rights. The issue of land ownership by women has similarly been put on Uganda's national agenda.

How can women promote democracy?

As mothers, women shape the views and attitudes of their children about life and their surroundings. Through socialisation they facilitate and promote the teaching of justice and democracy and thus shape the destiny of our nation. The decisions made by women are usually guided by their desire to provide for and safeguard the future of their children and families. Women should participate in decision-making right from the household up to the national level. They should thus exercise their constitutional right to vote in the referendum 2000 and in the general elections that will follow. Women should also be encouraged to contest for political office.

Participation of women in a democracy

In a democracy women can effectively participate by:

- Attending and actively participating in local governance (Local Council) and community development meetings;
- Getting involved in discussions and debates on development;
- Respecting the rights and freedoms of other citizens;
- Fostering national unity and living in harmony with others;
- Using legal channels to challenge official action that is detrimental to citizens rights;
- Voting in general elections and the referendum
- Contesting for political office in local and national elections;

Women and Politics

Politics is a complex set of processes and relationships whereby the affairs of a country are governed. The politics of a particular group or organisation are the relationships within that group, which allow particular people to have power over others. Women's participation in Uganda's politics has brought on board new priorities and perspectives into the political process and the organisation of society. Their participation ensures that decisions made by the government are fair and sensitive to their needs.

Why should women participate in politics?

Women should be made to understand that their participation in Uganda's politics is very important given that they are the majority of the population. They should participate in making of decisions that affect their well being and the future of their children. In a democratic society their influence can be considerable. It is therefore important for women to take the lead, organise themselves and articulate their issues. Women should be made to realise that their votes whether in a general election or referendum can make a difference by influencing the election outcome and the issues that politicians address.

Women's participation in Uganda's politics in the last two decades

Women have come a long way as regards political participation. They have always participated in politics but at different levels of society, both as voters and candidates. The major sphere of women's political participation has been through community groups and women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on the local and national level. Their increased visibility in public politics, recognition of their rights as full-citizens and more education has enabled them to become much more actively involved in the political life of Uganda at every level. Women's participation in the politics of the 1970s and 1980s was restricted by the existing political atmosphere.

However, during the 1980 general elections, more women were involved than before. Women made attempts to come up in their own right as party members. In the 1981 – 86 bush war, women were instrumental in the armed struggle. They joined not only the rank and file in the struggle but also gave moral and other logistical support to the struggle.

With the changing times, a favourable environment has been created by the government, i.e. affirmative action has been introduced as a special measure to enable groups originally discriminated against to get into fields they were originally excluded from.

Women's achievements in Politics

It is important to highlight some of the achievements made by women as a result of their participation in politics.

- ❖ One of the biggest achievements of the women's political participation has been their contribution to the enactment of a gender sensitive national Constitution in Uganda. The Constitution recognises women as full citizens of Uganda with equal rights with men. The Constitution is a landmark for women in the democratisation process, in that vital provisions affecting women and other marginalized groups have been incorporated. It is hoped that through such provisions many women will exercise their rights.

It is important to note that Uganda's Constitution emphasises five major types of provisions on women's legal rights, namely:

- i) General equal protection;
- ii) Equality and non-discrimination;
- iii) Sexual equality
- iv) Equality of the spouse in marriage;
and
- v) Equal pay for the work/sexual equality
in employment

- ❖ Uganda is one of the countries in the world with a big number of women parliamentarians. Through affirmative action, there is a woman member of Parliament from every district of Uganda. There are also women parliamentarians who contested with men and were directly elected into parliament.
- ❖ In the local government 33% of the councillors are women right from the village level up to the district council countrywide.
- ❖ Government has adopted affirmative action policy in order to remove the imbalance that exists between women and men. It is also working towards amending all laws that discriminate against and disadvantage women so that they comply with the Constitution.
- ❖ At the local level, women have participated in decision making on development issues and they are involved

in policy formulation in Uganda. Women's participation in voluntary groups, NGO's and their involvement in programmes and projects of development agencies has made a lot of positive impact on development policies.

Women and the Referendum

For the majority of women in Uganda, the referendum 2000 is going to be their first experience to participate in a referendum. Civic educators have therefore got a big responsibility to mobilise them so that they understand the relevance of the referendum and why they should participate.

Why should women participate in the referendum?

Women are recognised as full citizens of Uganda and have the right and duty to participate in politics at all levels. Their participation makes them active beneficiaries (and not subjects) in the democratic process of governance. Failure of women to participate in the 2000 referendum on political systems will mean that they have missed a great opportunity in deciding on how their society should be ruled and managed. The women's vote in the referendum will make a great difference because they are the majority of Uganda's population.

It is the responsibility of the civic educators to make women understand why they should participate in Uganda's politics by voting in the referendum and the general elections. Point out to them that they will be able to make an informed decision on what kind of political system they wish to be governed under if they attend civic education and the campaign meetings.

Benefits of participating in the 2000 referendum

Women should be made to understand that by voting in the referendum they would have exercised their right to vote as Ugandan citizens and participated in Uganda's democratic process. The referendum is the only way guaranteed by the Constitution for Ugandans (women and men) to choose and adopt a political system of their choice, through a national process of voting.

What will women lose by not participating in the referendum?

No one will be punished for not voting. But women should be told that it is their right and duty to vote as full citizens of Uganda. Women should know that their vote will make a significant difference to the results of the referendum. The side a woman supports could lose because of her apathy towards the referendum together with the apathy of others. The civic educator should clarify that a woman's choice not to vote means that she has accepted that other people should make a decision on her behalf

on how Uganda should be governed. She cannot change the result once the vote has been taken.

Women and Civic Education

Civic education must be made relevant to the situation of women in a particular area or location bearing in mind their special needs and interests. Women need to know about their rights in the family, clan, community, tribe and the country. This will enable them to understand their obligations, and be in position to demand and defend their rights.

The civic educators should be sensitive to the low literacy rates among women and ensure that information given to them is simplified to their understanding. They should ensure that women are motivated to participate in discussions relating to the referendum and avoid using complicated language.

Motivating women to attend civic education programmes

Attending civic education programmes and getting involved in democratic processes is seen by some women as adding an extra burden to their workload. It is therefore important that women are encouraged to participate in these activities by making the civic education programme accessible and attractive to them. This will require the special skills of the civic educators in the use of participatory methods of imparting information and their appreciation of the women's workload.

What should civic educators do?

- Civic education activities should be brought nearer to women by conducting it at centres that are accessible to them.
- Women should be assured that there will be no violence or repercussions on their person and property if they participate in civic education programmes, campaign meetings and rallies and in the referendum elections.
- Women should be provided with simplified and translated reading materials about the referendum 2000.
- The civic educators should use simple and clear language understood by the local people. The translations of civic education materials should be in the local language used in the area.
- The timing of the public civic education sessions should be convenient for women and not when they are in their gardens or preparing meals for their families.
- Where possible the civic educators should go out of their way to particularly motivate women to participate in the referendum process by providing information in places like markets where women are employed or are likely to go for shopping, at the well, at immunisation centres, and in antenatal clinics.
- The civic educators should build the women's confidence in order for them to actively participate in discussions relating to their civic rights and the referendum.

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- Civic educators should make the discussion participatory and involve women by giving them a chance to ask questions and respond to their concerns. Make everyone feel valued and their experiences relevant.
 - The civic education programme should not be too long and special attention should be paid to the heavy burden of the domestic work women have to do.
 - The benefits of the referendum in relation to women's interests and needs should be clearly articulated by the civic educators.

Responding to the concerns of women about the referendum

Women are likely to have particular concerns about the referendum and civic educators should be prepared to respond to them. In answering questions asked by women, a civic educator should not sound intimidating or expose women to ridicule. The most likely questions to be asked by women will possibly relate to how the referendum will affect the stability of their families and communities, their living status and the security of their person, families and property.

How will women know which political system is the best?

Women should be encouraged to attend campaign meetings of the various sides and listen to all options and

arguments raised by the advocates of each of the political systems. This will enable them to decide on their own free will which side they wish to support. No woman should be forced to vote for a system that she does not want. Women should be made to understand the meaning of political systems and how they impact on their lives.

If the women insist on knowing the advantages and disadvantages of the different political systems, the civic educators should advise them to attend the campaign meetings of the various sides. It is not the duty of the civic educator to guide women on which political system to choose.

Won't women be victimised by their husbands or male relatives for the choice they make?

Voting in the referendum will be by secret ballot and women will have the chance to make an independent decision. No one will know which side a woman has voted for unless she discloses it on her own free will.

It is a crime for anyone to be victimised because of the choice one makes during the referendum. No woman should therefore be victimised. Women should avoid provoking violence by challenging their husbands or male counterparts if they support opposing sides. Men should also be educated that women are free to express their own opinion and they should not be victimised for doing so.

What should a woman do if she is victimised?

If women are harassed because of the choice they make in the referendum 2000 they should:

- ⊙ Immediately report their tormentors to the Local Councils (LCs) in their area of residence or in the area where they have been harassed.
- ⊙ Report to the nearest police station and make a written statement.
- ⊙ Follow up the case with the relevant authorities and where possible open up a case against their tormentors with the courts of law.
- ⊙ Inform civic educators.

JANUARY 2000, KAMPALA UGANDA