



EDITORIAL

In April MEWC launched a new initiative, "[Monitoring Gender Mainstreaming within the African Regional Organisations](#)". This initiative will monitor and document gender-mainstreaming efforts made by various African regional organizations and will focus on more than just participation. We want to make sure that the experience, knowledge, and interests of women are included in the development agenda, and that all organizations practice a gender sensitive approach in their hiring practices, and develop policies on sexual harassment in the work place.

We hope that by monitoring gender mainstreaming in the African regional organizations, we can, firstly, encourage the organizations to acknowledge the need for goals, strategies, and actions, which promote and benefit women in the development process. Secondly, we hope to make social and institutional structures equal for both men and women. Last, and perhaps most importantly, by monitoring the gender mainstreaming process of African regional organizations, we want to hold African Governments accountable for all inclusive and exclusive practices.



In other news, MEWC will host a series of workshops, *African Women Empowering Each Other to Lead*, designed to empower Diaspora African women between May to September 2012. The goal of the program is to mobilize women to increase their advocacy efforts, and to promote collective efforts by women to be involved at all levels of society. The first workshop will take place in May and will cover the theme of Gender-Based Violence and the Legal Frameworks of Human and Women's Rights. Other workshops will be held in June, July, and September and will cover topics such as Empowering Entrepreneurial Women, Communications Skills, Women's Leadership and Capacity Building, and Women's Empowerment through Social Media.

You can find more information and register for the workshops on our [Empowering Diaspora: African Women to Lead](#) page, located under the tools section on our website. Because space is limited, if you wish to register for a workshop, we strongly urge you to do so in advance.

INTERVIEW OF THE MONTH

[AFRICA: OUR INTERVIEW OF THE MONTH WITH ALICE MUHIRWA](#)

Alice Muhirwa is a 31 old-years and mother of 2. She holds a Bacc degree in Economics from the independent university of kigali. She also acquired a human rights certificate in 2002 from the Christian Faith International (CFI) and has over 5 years of experience working with local organizations. She has been very active with women's student association acting as Gender promoter, with a focus on promoting peace, gender equality and advocacy for women's rights. Alice went into politics in 2010, she is currently the National treasurer of a yet registered opposition political party named FDU-inkingi.



How do you as a politician and women's rights activist work to improve the position and condition of women in Rwanda?

Politics sets the humanitarian guidelines for other factors effecting women's position, such as socio-economic progress of women and human rights of women. Women's empowerment results from a well-structured political program. It only makes sense to participate in politics while supporting particular policies and proposals on certain development pillars such as human rights, environment and technology. As an active member of a student women's association, I have emerged as a strong promoter of peacebuilding; I value fundamental human rights as well as the promotion of a tolerant culture based on truth and dialogue. I take any opportunity to sensitize women on their fundamental human rights, justice and reconciliation accompanied with the power from acting in a group.

Rwanda has been hailed around the world for its high level of women in government. Has the number of women in government translated into a better life for the average Rwandan woman?

Surely the parliamentary seat increase in favor of women does not automatically equal progress made for women's status. Despite the increase of women in government, Rural women are still forgotten, the rate of maternal mortality is still increasing, and the number of women accessing capital and loans is still questionable. There is little progress being made to increase the literacy rate of women, 70% of women are illiterate in Rwanda. Thus, having a large proportion of seats in parliament does not respond with effective gender equitable policies. Gender activism will need even more support from Parliament.

AU launched the AWD in October 2010, an entire decade dedicated to women and girls in Africa. What are your impressions and what changes could this decade bring to women and girls in Africa?

It is encouraging, for the young women to make a commitment to themselves to act for their own. It will have positive impacts on African women and Africa in general.

How do you see the place of women in the Rwanda of the future?

Women make up a huge portion of Rwanda's legislative positions. It is evident that women

hold posts like education, health and parliament. But the hope is to have the same reality for women from rural areas; women serving in positions in the army, policy and in the highest offices of development and labour.

What do you think Rwanda can teach the world when it comes to transforming "traditional" culture to match the culture of women's rights?

Rwanda has reformed certain laws on gender equity and access to schooling compared to other African country where culture still considers women second-class citizens. Rwanda has encouraged women to participate in governance and decision making positions. This is a tangible step up compared to other nearby countries. But still we don't have to stop here, we have to continuing trying to achieve a better community with an average of zero percent female illiteracy, with zero percent maternal mortality rate, without malnutrition of women and children, and then we will be allowed to sing the triumph!

How can we increase women political participation in Africa?

By encouraging them to the pursue higher education, I find it too logical to only base our advocacy work on achieving just basic education for all. We should be encouraging African women to also pursue higher education, so that they will be enabled to face the social challenges with facts and knowledge. They will be competitive for those decision-making and leadership positions.

Women have the right to own land and property, also they can choose to pool their assets with their husband or they can keep them separate when they marry. These are significant steps for women's rights; have the laws been successfully implemented. Are average women benefitting from the legislation?

This law is under revision, it does not reflect in general the progress of the woman, but rather the national program to identify free zones in order to standardize The Housing environment.

What are some of the key areas in the women's rights movement where progress is needed?

In February, the Rwandan civil society, strongly protested on the 3 months maternity leave proposed by Ladies commettee, saying the maternity leave should reduce up 30 days ,stipulating "... The lady in need will either choose to back at work just after 30 days ;or will be suspended for the additional period she may request ...".Considering this point; the Rwandan civil society less value the maternity leave and of course the Children right to be at least 6months breastfed . The equal work for equal pay is always sensitive, the gender based violence is still remarkable, the national police force recognizes several cases of rapes and students, domestic employees' sexual abuse, spouses' assassinations, etc...

HIGHLIGHT OF THE MONTH

[HIGHLIGHT OF THE MONTH WITH THE KUFEE TENA/ WOMEN'S VOICE](#)

Make Every Woman Count was on the ground last week in beautiful Zanzibar where we met women from the group [Kufaa Tena/Women's Voice](#). Kufaa Tena in Kiswahili means, "to be useful again," which was chosen as the name as they started their work in 2005 as recycling project. They later added Women's Voice to the title in order to better capture the fact that they are a women's organization that serves as a means of economic empowerment for the women of their small community.

The women initially began collecting plastic from the beaches in Bwejuu Village in Zanzibar to remake into crafts. At this point in time, founder Zakia Kibida did not have any craft or sewing skills but was eager to learn. The idea originally came from an American woman, the owner of the lodge where Zakia worked, who had witnessed a similar projects success in Ethiopia. Eager to make a difference in her community and generate an income for her family, Zakia bravely rose to the challenge and taught herself how to weave by looking at models of the products she wished to create. She soon mobilized other women in the community and not long after they were 30 and eager to change their lives and better their community. [READ MORE](#)



TOP WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY NEWS

[UGANDA: LAND DISPUTES THREATEN NORTHERN PEACE](#)

Source: IRIN

Inter-communal disputes over land and the allocation of land to private investors for cultivation, could threaten peace in parts of northern Uganda, warn officials.

[LIBERIA: UN WOMEN DEDICATE PEACE HUTS](#)

Source: The Inquirer

The United Nations (UN) Women in Liberia has dedicated two peace huts to the women of Weala, Margibi County and the women of Totota and Salala District, lower Bong County.

TOP VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN NEWS

[MALI: ARMED GROUPS IN NORTHERN MALI RAPING WOMEN](#)

Source: IPS

Increasing numbers of Malian women are being raped by Tuareg rebels and armed groups that have swept across the north of Mali since the beginning of year, expelling all government troops from the region.

[NIGERIA: MY HUSBAND NEARLY KILLED ME – LAMENTS WIFE](#)

Source: Vanguard

Domestic violence is as old as man. It often occurs in the privacy of the home. Because a man's home is often referred to and regarded as his "castle", whatever a man does within the privacy of the home has often escaped the scrutiny of the public, yet it persists.

TOP POLITICAL PARTICIPATION NEWS

[ZIMBABWE: A NEW COALITION TAKE THE LEAD ON WOMEN'S CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS IN ZIMBABWE](#)

Source: UN WOMEN

Women from across Zimbabwe have celebrated the launch of a strategic high-level women's coalition. The voluntary group will lobby to ensure that the new constitution, currently being drafted, will deliver on gender equality and empowerment for women in the country.

[MAURITIUS: MAURITIUS TO INTRODUCE GENDER BILL](#)

Source: Africa Review

Mauritius is set to launch a National Women's Council Bill to boost their empowerment and fair representation in high offices, official said.

TOP ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT NEWS

[GUINEA BISSAU: GENDER INNOVATION FUND SUPPORTS WOMEN FARMERS IN GUINEA-BISSAU](#)

Source: World Food Organisation

Through the Gender Innovation Project, WFP Guinea-Bissau is supporting women's farming associations in the regions of Bafata and Oio. In exchange for part of their fresh produce, which goes towards WFP school meals in 16 schools, WFP gives farming equipment to the women.

[SWAZILAND: WOMEN STRIKE OVER LIES ABOUT PAY](#)

Source: Swazi Media Company

Workers went on strike at a major Taiwanese-owned textile factory in Swaziland to protest that the company had claimed its workers are well paid, when they are not.

TOP HIV/AIDS & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

[ETHIOPIA: STILL TOO MANY DEATHS IN CHILDBIRTH](#)

Source: IRIN

Lack of awareness of the importance of skilled hospital deliveries in Ethiopia, cultural beliefs, and transport challenges in rural areas are causing a high number of deaths during childbirth, say officials.

[ZAMBIA: WILZA URGES EASY ACCESS TO FAMILY PLANNING SERVICES](#)

Source: Saturday Post Online

The government should ensure that all sexually active people have access to affordable and easy health services on family planning, says WILSA.

HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

[KENYA: HUMAN RIGHTS NOT A PRIVILEGE](#)

Source: AllAfrica

Human rights are natural, intrinsic and are not given by governments, spouses, parents or institutions, says Nduta Kweheria, a senior programmes officer with the Kenya Human Rights Commission. Speaking to the press in Nakuru ton yesterday, Kweheria said it is the responsibility of governments, spouses, parents and institutions to help citizens access and enjoy human rights.

[SOMALIA: EQUAL RIGHTS FOR SOMALI WOMEN](#)

Source: The Emory Wheel

When we think about Somalia, the image that comes to mind is that of a 20-year-old failed state that struggles to rid itself of al-Shabaab, an Islamic militia group with ties to al-Qaeda and the destitution it has created. However, one important aspect that is largely ignored is the plight of women in Somalia.

GENERAL

[GHANA: MINISTER CALLS ON WOMEN TO EMBRACE JOBS IN ICT SECTOR](#)

Source: Ghana Vibes

Mr Haruna Iddrisu, Minister of Communication, on Thursday called on 1 stakeholders to develop policies and strategies to ensure that women are integrated into employment sector at all levels of responsibility.

[UGANDA: IPU DEMANDS FREE VACCINES AND MEDICINES FOR WOMEN](#)

Source: New Vision

THE inter-Parliamentary Union has urged member states to ensure free access to vaccines and medicines to protect women and children from diseases.

FEATURED RESOURCES

[ACCOUNTABILITY FOR MATERNAL, NEWBORN, AND CHILD SURVIVAL: AN UPDATE ON PROGRESS IN PRIORITY COUNTRIES](#)

Source: World Health Organisation

This report has been developed by Countdown to 2015 in support of the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health and the follow-up to the report of the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health, Keeping Promises. Measuring Results.

In this publication, Countdown to 2015 provides profiles for the countries where more than 95% of all maternal and child deaths occur. The profiles highlight how well each country is doing in increasing coverage of high-impact interventions that can save the lives or millions of women and children.

[CONTRACEPTIVE COMMODITIES FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH: KEY DATA AND FINDINGS](#)

Source: UNFPA

Expanding access to a choice of affordable and appropriate contraceptive commodities is critical to achieving the goal of reproductive health for all. This report, prepared for the United Nations Commission on Commodities for Women and Children's Health, provides a

review of three contraceptive commodities that are considered to be overlooked or underutilized: the female condom, hormonal implants and emergency contraception

In selecting for special attention these three overlooked contraceptive methods, the Commission focused on ensuring access to methods that are in demand, show promise for increasing public health benefits (including beyond pregnancy prevention), and have received inadequate attention from the public and private sector. To realize the full public health benefits, it is also essential to ensure that women are able to choose a method that fits within their own fertility goals and life circumstances.

Under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary-General's Every Woman Every Child initiative, the Commission on Life-Saving Commodities for Women and Children advocates at the highest levels for the increased availability, affordability and accessibility of essential but underutilized commodities for maternal and child health.

MEWC BLOG

[AS AFRICA'S 2ND FEMALE PRESIDENT JOYCE BANDA TAKES OFFICE, NEW HOPES FOR MALAWI](#)

Less than a week ago, Joyce Banda, vice-president of Malawi, was sworn in as the country's new president following the death of President Bingu wa Mutharika. Mutharika had been in office since 2004 and was successful re-elected in 2009. However, his popularity plummeted as he failed to improve the country's economic situation and claims of human rights violations and bad governance emerged. In recent months, opposition urged him to step down and hold an election referendum, which he refused. When he died on 5 April of a heart failure, it took the government two days to announce his death, prompting speculations and fears of dispute over his succession. On 7 April, his death was confirmed and his Vice-President Joyce Banda was sworn in as his successor. However, their relationship was not cloudless. In 2010, Banda came into direct opposition with Mutharika as he tried to groom his own brother, Peter, for his succession.



Photo from [The Guardian](#): Joyce Banda holds a ceremonial sword at her inauguration as Malawi's new president, becoming its first female leader. Photograph: Stephane De Sakutin/AFP/Getty

Banda left the governing party in protest and formed her own opposition party, called the People's Party. However, as the office of Vice-President is an elected and constitutional one, she remained in her position, despite her vocal opposition to the President.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION MONTHLY UPDATE

Gambia:

The 2012 legislative elections took place in The Gambia on March 29. **Bintanding Jarju** of Foni Brefett was the one female candidate to run in this year's legislative election. Jarju said if elected, for which she was optimistic, she would make Foni "second to none" depending on the availability of resources. Jarju insisted that she intended to influence donors, NGOs and government to bring projects to the "doorsteps of her people." [\[ii\]](#)

Women constitute 51% of the population and 58% of voters. But their numerical strength is not reflected in the number of positions they hold in decision-making positions. Female representation in the National Assembly is 13 % and falls far below that recommended by the Inter Parliamentary Union and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

In the civil service they are 21% of the work force of which the majority are employed in administrative and support positions rather than in managerial positions.

This year, Women won only 8.3% of the Parliamentary seats.

Mauritania:

Initially scheduled for March 29th 2012, the parliamentary elections have been re-scheduled for an undetermined date in May. Women's rights groups remain very active and vocal on a range of issues including slavery and harmful practices such as FGM. Women's groups are active in providing support and services to victims of rape and domestic violence. There is also a strong movement of women's cooperatives at the local level.

Mali:

The Malian Presidential elections were delayed after a coup d'état took place on March 21st 2012.

Women have played an important role in Malian politics with a small number of women holding Ministerial posts and seats in the National Assembly. Aminata Dramane Traoré, author and political activist served as the Minister of Culture and Tourism, coordinator of the United Nations Development Programme and board member of the International Press Service. Sidibé Aminata Diallo, a professor at the University of Bamako, is leader of the Movement for Environmental Education and Sustainable Development political party, and in 2007 became the first woman to stand for President of Mali, receiving over 12,000 votes in the election, or 0.55% of the total.

The coup d'état led by the military has left the country in an emergency state, with sexual and gender-based violence increasing drastically in the north. "As unrest continues in northern Mali, an alarming number of acts of sexual violence have been reported," the U.N.'s special representative on sexual violence in conflict, Margot Wallstrom, said. "Allegations include abductions, public rapes and subjecting women and girls to acts of sexual violence in front of

family members¹.”

UPCOMING EVENTS

[WOMEN FOR AFRICA AWARDS 2012](#)

Source: Women4Africa

Date: 19 May 2012, 17:00-00:00

Location: The Great Hall; Kensington Town Hall, Hornton Street, London

The ‘Women for Africa Awards UK’ 2012 will be held on 19th May 2012 at 5.00pm.

It will see a number of women of African origin from the categories awarded for their hard work, efforts, contributions and achievements.

A number of key figures will be in attendance both to present awards and to enjoy the awards gala which promises to be an evening filled with entertainment in the form of music and comedy, networking and the honouring of some of the most outstanding African women in UK.

[AFRICAN WOMEN EMPOWERING EACH OTHER TO LEAD](#)

Make Every Woman Count is organizing a series of [WORKSHOPS](#) between May - September 2012 designed to empower Diaspora African women to play a stronger role as decision-makers in community development and to participate in all areas of social, political and economic development. The goal of the program is to mobilize women to increase their advocacy efforts, and to promote collective efforts by women to be involved at all levels of the society.

The program aims to enable women to reach a level of critical understanding of their legal rights, raise social consciousness pertaining to the human rights violations women face, and provide women with the knowledge and skills to create strategies.

This event is FREE and open to all Diaspora African women, however, places are limited and it will be on the first comes first served basis. To avoid disappointment, register as soon as possible to reserve a place.

To find out more about the program and to book your place, please visit the workshop page [African Women Empowering Each Other to Lead](#) choose the workshops you would like to attend, fill in the booking form and send it to info@makeeverywomancount.org

[DIALOGUE FOR ACTION AFRICA](#)

The Cecilia Attias Foundation for Women, in association with Mrs. Sylvia Bongo Ondimba, First Lady of Gabon, is proud to present the Dialogue for Action Africa, an international forum dedicated to promoting health and well-being for all women. On June 11, 2012 in Libreville, Gabon, the Dialogue for Action Africa will bring together an exceptional group of speakers and

¹ Mail & Guardian April 24 2012

participants – ngo leaders, government officials, academics, business leaders, and medical experts – to discuss innovative solutions to the most pressing problems that african women face. This unique, day-long session will include action-driven discussions, informed by the diverse experiences of our esteemed participants. [Read more...](#)