

**THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN NAMIBIA:
HISTORY, CONSTRAINTS AND POTENTIAL
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As a starting point, it is difficult to say whether there is something which can validly be called "a women's movement" in Namibia at present. On the one hand, it is possible to speak of a Namibia women's movement in two senses. Firstly, although there is no single organization which speaks for all Namibian women, various non-governmental organizations and governmental bodies which are concerned about issues affecting women have on occasion been able to put aside their differences to work together to achieve common aims. Secondly, there is a growing perception amongst Namibian women that many of their social and economic problems are related to their position as women, and they are showing an increasing interest in organizing to address such problems jointly.

On the other hand, it is perhaps misleading to speak of "a" women's movement in a nation divided by a host of factors, including race, ethnicity, class, political affiliation, geography and historical experience. Most formally-organised women's groups are dominated by black, urban, educated women who cannot be viewed as adequately representing the needs of the majority of Namibia's women.

A women's movement may also be a misnomer in the sense that Namibian women have not yet discovered how to utilise their combined political strength effectively to advance the position of women. Past attempts at achieving organizational unity have been unsuccessful, and there is now a trend towards looser alliances around specific issues. Despite the existence of a government body with the task of helping to coordinate the efforts of various women's groups, the most dynamic forces for the advancement of women are independent non-governmental and community organizations with their own issues and agendas.

The authors take the view that there is a sufficient degree of networking and mutual support amongst these various individual groups to warrant the use of the term "women's movement" to describe them. Rather than adopting a single overarching thesis, this paper attempts to provide an analytical description of the evolution of the Namibian women's movement to date; although clear strengths and weaknesses can be identified, the major developments which have taken place do not yet seem to fit into a single pattern.

Historically, the problems stemming from discrimination against women were compounded by the racial discrimination and general underdevelopment of the colonial era. Gender was first used as a framework for analysis by the women's wings of the liberation movements which were fighting

first and foremost for national self-determination. Grassroots organization of women around bread-and-butter issues intensified within the country in the latter years of the liberation struggle.

In 1990 Namibia became an independent, democratic state with a Constitutional commitment to eradicate all sex discrimination. The early years of independence have given impetus to action around issues of special concern to women, as patterns of life under colonial rule are slowly being re-shaped. It is a time of opportunity for women.

The decision to abandon the vision of an all-embracing unity in favour of the idea of strategic "unity-in-diversity" has probably been a wise one. The women's movement has been fairly successful in ensuring that women's concerns are articulated at a national level, and in increasing gender sensitivity in public policy. However, action on matters of concern to women is moving at a slow pace, and the groups which promote issues of relevance to women are not yet adequately representative of the broad spectrum of women who make up Namibian society. In short, the women's movement has not yet managed to mobilise the full power of Namibia's women.

The context: points of diversity and unity

In order to understand the challenges faced by the women's movement in Namibia, it is first necessary to examine the complex divisions and diversity which characterise this small nation. The population of approximately one and a half million, 51% of which comprises women, is spread over a land mass almost 6« times the size of England and includes at least 12 major ethnic and language groups, which are in turn divided into overlapping subgroups who sometimes speak distinct dialects. {1}

During the colonial period, the Namibian population was stratified into three racial groups -- blacks, whites and "coloureds" (a colonially-created category for mixed-race persons who fell between blacks and whites in matters such as educational and economic opportunities). At the same time, as a divide-and-rule tactic, eleven different "population groups" identified by the colonial authorities were assigned different second-tier governing bodies, with the black groups being relegated to different geographical homelands. {2} Namibia's rich cultural variety was thus made the basis for profound political and economic discrimination, the effects of which are proving difficult to eradicate in the post-independence era.

As a result of this history, the experience of sexual oppression was and still is heavily intertwined with race and class distinctions. Independence has given rise to a new black elite which shares more common interests with middle class whites than with black members of the working class, thus blurring racial differences amongst the privileged classes. However, both race and class distinctions continue to operate as divisive forces in the women's movement.

These intricate planes of dissimilarity are overlaid with a considerable degree of political fragmentation. Namibia became a sovereign nation on 21 March 1990, following a 23-year struggle to achieve freedom from South African rule. Although the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) was the clear leader in the liberation struggle {3} and is now a strong majority party, more than 40 different political parties were in existence at the time of Namibia's first free and fair elections in 1989. Political activity has been rationalised in recent years, leaving only a handful of active parties, and SWAPO has become increasingly dominant since independence. {4} But party-political loyalties are still frequently a divisive factor.

Since independence, political diversity has been supplemented by an increasing number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in different spheres. These groups often acquire party-political associations, voluntarily or involuntarily. {5} The political identities acquired by women's organizations have been subtle and complex, but nevertheless problematic.

Another point of diversity is the differing experiences of the 40-50 000 people who engaged in the pre-independence liberation struggle from exile (involving educational experiences in countries as diverse as Britain, Finland and Cuba), compared to the experiences of the majority of the population who remained inside the country. With respect to the women's movement, while both men and women in exile benefitted from contact with other feminisms in other countries, at the same time they unavoidably lost touch with practical conditions inside Namibia. Returning Namibians who benefitted from educational opportunities abroad have also formed the backbone of a new black elite, from whom grassroots women often feel alienated. {6}

Namibia is also characterized by complex geographical and ethnic distinctions which complicate the nation's urban-rural divide. For example, there are crucial distinctions in organizational style and characteristics between Windhoek, the nation's capital and centre of political activity, and smaller towns which also function as "urban" centres in some respects. {7} At the same time, there are fundamental differences in community dynamics in both rural and "urban" settings between broad geographical areas which are roughly defined as the north and the south. Women also experience different problems and priorities in Namibia's thirteen different political regions, which are in some cases isolated from each other by long distances and difficult travelling conditions. {8}

Namibia's different ethnic groups, which still have different geographical centres as a legacy of both history and apartheid, follow different customs and traditions. To cite only one example, some communities in Namibia are matrilineal while others are patrilineal. The largest ethnic group in Namibia, from which the ruling party draws much of its support, consists of Oshiwambo-speaking people based in several regions in the far north of the country; however, the numerical dominance of this group has not been directly translated into political dominance. {9} Of Namibia's many other ethnic groups, the Himba and the San are widely considered to be the most marginalised, partly because of their low numbers and partly because they have little or no urban presence or representation.

Thus, a Namibian woman's individual experience may be shaped, not only by her race and class, but also by her political affiliations, by whether she lives in Windhoek or in a smaller town or in a rural area, by whether she lives in the north or the south, by the situational characteristics which may be unique to her region, and by the ethnic identity of her particular community. This multiplicity of experiences creates an immense challenge for national organization by women's groups.

Amidst all this diversity, there are some significant unifying factors. It is estimated that 90% of Namibia's population is Christian. {10} Although the early Christian church in Namibia played a role in the colonial occupation and subjugation of the indigenous people, most denominations ultimately became ardent and consistent challengers of the apartheid state. {11} The church has been an important force at community level, both before and since independence, and Christianity provides a common moral ground on certain issues. However, Christian beliefs in Namibia are often manifested in the form of conservative Christian doctrine which works against the interests of women; for example, Biblical teachings are often cited in both personal and political settings to justify the subordination of women, particularly in the family context. {12} Therefore, the potential of the church as a vehicle for organising women is limited.

Another point of convergence is a slowly growing sense of nationhood. There is a political commitment to encouraging a concept of Namibian nationality which will unite the diverse population, and to de-emphasising political assertions of ethnic identity. {13} Nevertheless, ethnic, political, racial, regional and class-based conflicts are still strong and unquestionably influential in the various divisions and alliances around women's issues.

Organization of women prior to independence

It is difficult to generalize about pre-colonial gender relations in Namibia's multiplicity of ethnic groups. {14} However, it can be said that in many communities there was a sex-based division of labour in which women played an important if unequal role in both production and reproduction. For example, in Herero pastoral communities, the exclusion of women from hunting and stock-raising limited their role in production and confined them mainly to child-rearing and tasks around the house. In the mixed-farming Owambo communities, women were also barred from animal husbandry, but were engaged in crop production as well as being responsible for reproductive tasks in the household. But it was mainly the men who decided when and how crops and livestock would be used. The harvest from the wife's plot was consumed by the household while that from the husband's plot was disposed of by him as surplus profit. Thus, even though women were involved in production, their economic role was marginalised.

Positions of influence in pre-colonial communities were generally held by men, although there were some exceptions, and men usually had larger economic decision-making power within extended family units. Lobola (bride-price) also contributed to the relatively inferior position of women; men often believed that they could exercise total control and power over their wives since they had "paid" for them. Polygamy, while ensuring sufficient labour for the household and arguably reducing the workload of individual women, intensified sexual inequality by tying a woman's status to her rank as wife.

While women's pre-colonial position was later analysed as conferring an inferior status upon them in most communities, it has been asserted that notions of gender equality or inequality were simply non-existent during this early period, and that men and women were perceived as inhabiting and controlling different and complementary spheres. {15}

During this period, the missionary influence was undermining traditional ideology and religion, and holding up submission and subordination as model behaviour for women -- while also providing useful educational opportunities for women in some parts of the country. In the white settler communities, women generally remained in the private domain of the home while the realm of public activity was completely male-dominated.

Colonial rule brought new legal, social and economic bases for women's subordination. Gender dynamics were profoundly affected by the system of migrant labour which was imposed by the colonial administration in 1925, primarily to ensure a supply of cheap labour in the country's mines. A range of influx control laws ensured that workers' families remained in rural "native reserves", which became in effect dumping grounds for women, children, the aged and the sick.

The result of migrant labour was an increased workload for women, who had to assume the tasks traditionally performed by men in addition to their usual productive and reproductive duties. This increased labour did not necessarily mean increased decision-making power, however, as male members of the family generally continued to exert control over the household's major economic resources on their infrequent visits home. Furthermore, men engaged in wage employment, who frequently acquired a second "family" in the places where they worked, did not always send regular remittances home, thus increasing the burden on women to find alternate sources of income for the household's cash expenses. {16}

As the years passed, environmental degradation, increasing poverty, a greater reliance on a cash economy, and the dangers of the liberation war all encouraged increasing numbers of people, including women, to flee the rural areas in search of wage employment in cities and towns. However, women have remained consistently under-represented in formal sector employment. For example, women accounted for only one-third of the formal labour force in 1988 and were concentrated in domestic work -- where they had no legal protection and were vulnerable to exploitation by employers. {17} The majority of black women, particularly those who remained in

the rural areas, were forced to rely on subsistence agriculture and informal economic activities such as the sale of beer, food and baskets. Other women were forced into prostitution, many of them servicing members of the colonial military forces who were stationed along Namibia's northern border. Thus, women's economic marginalisation contributed to their overall disempowerment in the pre-independence era. {18}

Although it is difficult to pinpoint a particular time or event as the definitive beginning of Namibia's rather amorphous women's movement, it clearly has important roots in the liberation struggle. Women had historically been actively involved in various forms of resistance to colonial domination. {19} When political attempts to achieve independence were supplemented by armed struggle in 1966, women overcame initial male opposition to participate as combatants in the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), the guerrilla force which was the military wing of SWAPO. An equally important role was played by women who remained inside the country and provided crucial material and psychological support to the "freedom fighters".

Women also suffered from the direct and indirect consequences of the liberation war -- ranging from rape, torture and imprisonment to the health, social and economic hardships stemming from unemployment and underdevelopment. {20}

Against the background of these experiences, a SWAPO Women's Council was formed in 1969 and formally inaugurated as a wing of SWAPO in 1976, soon establishing an active presence both inside and outside Namibia. The South West Africa National Union (SWANU), a smaller liberation movement, also established a women's wing during this period. {21}

Although these groups discussed steps to end the oppression of women, this goal was subordinated to the overriding objective of achieving national independence which was considered a prerequisite for improving the condition of women. Black women experienced a combination of race, class and gender oppression, but it was the experience of living under apartheid colonialism which most affected women. Thus, it was only natural that the struggle for national liberation was accorded more prominence than the struggle for women's liberation in pre-independence Namibia. Although this approach has been criticised by some Western feminists, it has been the reality in a number of African countries, such as Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

Namibian women were mobilised primarily to support the liberation struggle, and the hierarchy of the liberation movements remained male-dominated. Nevertheless, the women's wings were an important conscientising force, as they provided the first significant framework for discussion and analysis of gender issues.

In the years immediately preceding independence, women inside the country also became increasingly active in local organizations formed to address community issues which affected their daily lives, such as rent increases and housing needs. Women were also particularly active in local church groups which focused on basic needs, such as caring for the sick and the elderly.

There was some coordination amongst these local church groups through the Women's Desk of the Council of Churches in Namibia (CCN), an ecumenical institution which spoke out strongly against the injustices stemming from apartheid. {22} A Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) which became active in Namibia in 1985 operated nationwide on an ecumenical basis, with a focus on small income-generating projects and educational programmes aimed at women.

However, the most significant women's group in Namibia in the pre-independence era was another ecumenical organization, the Namibia Women's Voice (NWV). Although the NWV was initiated in 1985 by women from various church groups, it rapidly acquired a broader identity as an alliance of women across party-political and denominational lines to address a spectrum of "women's issues". {23}

Total membership figures are unavailable, but NWV managed to establish thirteen regional branches in its first two years of existence. It had a strong grassroots appeal in both urban and rural areas, but its membership also included educated women in professions such as teaching, nursing and social work. Although there were a few progressive white women amongst the membership, NWV was predominantly a black organization; since the apartheid regime succeeded in keeping black and white Namibians apart on all fronts, it was difficult for women of different races to identify their common interests as women.

The NWV's mechanism for organization was the establishment of small income-generating and developmental projects. It brought women together for workshops on topics such as literacy, health education and leadership skills, while at the same time providing a forum to facilitate discussion and action on community problems. The NWV also took action on national issues; for example, it organized campaigns against the use of Depo Provera {24} and against the "hearts-and minds" tactics employed by the colonial government. {25}

Although there are conflicting accounts of the reasons for the dissolution of the NWV in 1989, one factor which is frequently cited is the opposition engendered by its challenge to male authority in church and political party hierarchies. The autonomy and success of the group were apparently threatening. For example, there was concern amongst the SWAPO leadership that the NWV was competing with the SWAPO Women's Council, even though all of the members of the NWV national executive were also members of SWAPO. There were also tensions between NWV and some of the churches, which pressed NWV to formalise its relationship with them.

The ability of NWV to mobilise grassroots women was envied by other groups, and the fact that NWV was successful in attracting funding for its projects may also have inspired rivalry. Some women have cited personal conflicts between some of the leaders of NWV as a contributing factor to its ultimate demise.

The NWV was unique in its emphasis on the practical problems faced by grassroots women. It played a seminal role in alerting women to the political dimension of the gender-related problems they faced in their daily lives, and in mobilising women around the integration of gender issues into the liberation struggle. It was also significant because, as the first major women's group to operate completely independently of party-political, church or other super-imposed structures, it provided a forum in which gender issues were not subordinated to other priorities. {26}

The impact of independence

Since Namibia became an independent nation on 21 March 1990, there has been a widespread sense of building anew which has included a receptivity to changes relating to gender issues. Women's issues were discussed during the election campaigns leading up to the country's United Nations-supervised elections in November 1989, but were not an influential factor as this election was primarily about independence and party loyalties rather than concrete policy issues. {27}

The framework created by the new Constitution and the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1992 has provided the women's movement with important tools.

For example, the Constitution (which employs a gender-neutral formulation of "he and she" throughout) explicitly forbids discrimination on the grounds of sex and authorises the establishment of affirmative action "with regard to the fact that women in Namibia have traditionally suffered special discrimination and that they need to be encouraged and enabled to play a full, equal and effective role in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the nation". {28} In addition, the Constitution guarantees that men and women of full age "shall be entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution". {29} Customary law continues to be recognised, but only to the extent that it does not violate the Constitution. {30}

However the Constitution also provides that all laws in force at independence remain in place until altered by Parliament or declared unconstitutional by a court. {31} Although it is possible for individuals to challenge unconstitutional laws in court, women have not yet utilised this approach to assert their rights. Women have not yet developed their political skills sufficiently to become a powerful lobby for change through the political process either. The result is that even though the tools for legal change are in place, the laws on most gender-related issues remain the same.

It is also notable that the first post-independence legal reforms relating specifically to women have been primarily those aimed at urban women and the small proportion of women in formal employment, such as reforms in tax and labour law. For example, all forms of sex discrimination in the workplace have been outlawed. Working women now have maternity protection which includes a right to twelve weeks' unpaid maternity leave, and a bill establishing a state scheme to provide income support during this period will soon be before Parliament.

Continuing gender inequalities in the civil and customary laws on marriage and inheritance, which have a profound impact on the status of all women, have yet to be addressed -- and it is likely to be much more difficult for the state to take effective action to improve the status of women in private, family settings than in the public sphere.

Shortly after independence, a Department of Women's Affairs (DWA) was established in the President's Office to facilitate liaison between women and the government and to help identify priorities for action. There is perhaps an inherent contradiction in the establishment of a government department to lobby other sectors of government on women's issues, and some women feared that the channelling of gender issues through a single department might have a marginalising effect. Nevertheless, the establishment of the DWA was symbolically important as a signal of the government's commitment to gender issues. {32}

Since independence there has been an increasing recognition of gender issues at policy levels. However, there is still a tendency to compartmentalize "women's issues" instead of integrating gender concerns into overall policy-making. Also, many government initiatives which are designed to benefit women have been donor-driven and have not really garnered sustainable momentum. The DWA and the government's National Planning Commission recently established an inter-ministerial Gender Network which is supposed to monitor gender issues in government policy. As of 1993 there were plans to expand the role of this network, as well as to incorporate more input from NGOs.

Independence has also brought a new level of participation by women in government structures. Despite the improvement over the pre-independence situation, women still represent only a tiny minority of the representatives at national and regional levels. {33} However, women constituted almost one-third of all local government representatives in 1993, due partly to a statutory affirmative action provision which required that political parties include a specified number of women on their lists of candidates. {34}

At a national level, the presence of even a small number of women has been significant, as these individuals have used their influence to draw attention to gender issues. {35} At the same time, it cannot be denied that the political arena and the major political parties continue to be male-dominated.

Since independence, Namibia has moved from an era of relative isolation into a period of intense international contact. This factor has given stimulus to the treatment of gender issues by both state agencies and non-governmental organizations, although international networking is not yet carried out as strategically as it might be.

In general, independence has brought high and often unrealistic expectations for rapid change which have inspired both energy and frustration. People have initially looked to the new government as the sole agency for bringing change to every aspect of their lives, while the government is faced with the task of re-designing everything from health care to education within the boundaries of severe economic constraints. Gender issues must compete for attention on a crowded national agenda.

It is in this climate that the women's movement has taken new forms and directions.

The dynamics of the post-independence women's movement

Efforts to create a unified umbrella body to speak on behalf of all Namibian women began even before independence, in recognition of the strategic importance of unity for effective lobbying and political action.

Shortly after independence, a steering committee composed of two delegates from each of thirteen interested women's groups began lengthy deliberations aimed at the formation of an umbrella body. {36} While it was not difficult to reach agreement on aims and objectives -- demonstrating that there is a certain unity of purpose amongst the various women's groups -- there was strong disagreement over the form which the umbrella group should take. The women's wings of the various political parties tended to favour an organization which women would join as individuals, to avoid the constraints of their party structures, while the NGOs tended to prefer a federation of existing groups on the grounds that this would be the most powerful form of alliance.

Before this debate was resolved, the effort fell apart, primarily because of splits along party-political lines exacerbated by personal competitiveness. {37} The result was the formation of two different umbrella bodies operating on a national level: a federation of women's organizations, and a national organization open to individual women. Partly because of their origins in the failed efforts at more thorough-going unity, each of these groups acquired political connotations -- with one being characterised as a "SWAPO grouping", while the other had its base amongst the opposition parties. In fact, both umbrella bodies drew their membership from more than one political persuasion, but the party-political identities endured.

The more apolitical NGOs withdrew from the efforts at unification altogether and have remained independent. There have been several subsequent initiatives which have attempted to draw women together across party lines, primarily in Windhoek, but these have remained informal and ad hoc in nature.

Since the collapse of the effort to establish a single women's group, there seems to be more acceptance of the notion of "unity in diversity". The process of attempting to achieve unity, acrimonious though it was, seems to have been a maturing process which has helped key individuals and groups to become better at working together strategically from time to time in order to achieve common aims. {38}

As of 1993, there are several different types of "women's groups" which are active in the country. Firstly, women's wings of political parties are still in existence. Although several of these facilitate ongoing projects, their primary focus is the mobilisation of women in relation to elections and the advancement of women within the parties. Because of the political party connection, it is difficult to gauge the degree of involvement in these groups; for example, every woman who becomes a member of SWAPO is automatically a member of the SWAPO Women's Council.

Secondly, as a result of the split in the attempt at unification mentioned above, there were for a time at least two national organizations which were active around a broad range of issues and attempted on some level to speak for "women". The federation associated with Namibia's

opposition parties is now dormant, but the Namibia National Women's Organization is still active and growing. This group continues to be perceived by many as being aligned with the ruling party. While it tries to reach out to a broad cross-section of women, at present it is still dominated by women who are seen as being part of an educated elite. {39}

Thirdly, there are special interest groups which focus on a particular issue. Examples include a group which provides education and counselling around the issue of violence against women, and a group which publishes a feminist magazine that reports on issues related to women in accessible language. Both of these groups have a small membership which includes black and white women, but they are primarily composed of educated, middle-class women who are attempting to provide services which will benefit women on a broader scale. Another example of this kind of group is a small organization of business and professional women which has been one of the few women's initiatives to attract a significant proportion of white women.

Fourthly, there are grassroots-based groups. The strongest component of this category is church-based groups, many of which operate at a local level and are primarily directed at the practical and social needs of the community rather than at "women's issues" as such. For example, many grassroots women are active in local choirs, Bible-study groups or small income-generating projects.

The only grassroots-based women's group known to operate in towns both north and south of Windhoek is Concerned Women against Violence against Women, an organization which concentrates on community issues and has relatively autonomous local groups in eight locations. The initial focal point of these groups was violence against women -- not only sexual violence, but all violent crimes which have an impact on women. More recently, they have expanded their agendas to other areas, including education on legal rights, income-generating projects, and the development of improved organizational skills. A few men are active in some of the groups, but all are still women-dominated and determined to remain that way. Similarly, although there are a few educated black and white women who are playing a supportive role, control of the groups remains in the hands of grassroots women.

Concerned Women has been fairly successful in reaching across ethnic and political-party boundaries; however, the profile of the group varies from place to place -- for example, the Windhoek group draws the majority of its membership from the Damara>Nama-speaking community. {40} There have been some tensions between the Concerned Women groups and some other women's organizations, partly because of competition for grassroots loyalty.

A number of other NGOs, while not specifically "women's groups", are nevertheless engaged in mobilising women around specific concerns. For example, the importance of the local churches as a meeting-ground for women has already been discussed. Some groups engaged in general development work have exhibited a high degree of gender awareness, as have some organizations involved in income generating projects and other special interests such as health and law.

The trade unions are also potentially significant organizing structures. Although most of the existing trade unions (like most of the sectors of formal employment) are male-dominated, a domestic workers' union and a teachers' union -- both of which have a majority of female members -- have taken a lead in addressing gender issues. {41} For example, the domestic workers' union is attempting to provide protection to women in a particularly vulnerable sector of the economy by promoting a model contract of employment. The teachers' union has made an effort to empower its female members by organizing leadership training seminars to improve women's skills and self-confidence.

The Namibia National Students' Organization (NANSO) has been especially successful at integrating gender concerns into its overall platform and structures. For example, there are

women's sub-committees with their own budgets in every branch. These subcommittees hold an annual national conference of their own, in addition to NANSO's full national conference, to ensure the fullest possible participation by women. NANSO is also structured in a way which ensures that women are represented on its highest decision-making bodies. The membership of NANSO is roughly half women, and careful attention to gender issues has produced a high level of gender-sensitivity in both male and female NANSO leaders. In recent years NANSO has actively taken up several gender-related issues, such as teenage pregnancy and the promotion of family life education in the school curriculum.

The organization of women in rural areas, where an estimated 70 percent of the Namibian population resides {42}, has been centred around income-generation and church-related activities. The precarious economic position of rural households, which are often headed by women, makes the appeal of income-generating activities understandable. {43} Before independence, churches were the main sponsors of such projects; however, since independence, various other organizations have become involved in this arena -- including non-governmental organizations, women's wings of political parties and the Department of Women Affairs. Many Windhoek-based activists have come to realise that such involvement can serve as an entry point for further mobilisation, and donor funding and assistance have contributed greatly to the proliferation of such projects.

The empowering effect of most such initiatives has been minimal. Many income-generating projects in which women are involved tend to be an extension of their traditional roles -- such as sewing, baking, gardening and poultry-rearing -- thereby perpetuating existing gender stereotypes. {44} Such projects have also tended to be modest in scope and lacking in sustainability because of the failure to carry out adequate feasibility studies, or because the women involved lack appropriate managerial skills. This fact has recently inspired a number of Windhoek-based groups which assist small business enterprises to include management skills training and evaluations amongst their services. Lack of adequate access to productive resources such as land and credit also remains a limiting factor for women's economic activity. {45}

Church activities such as prayer groups and choirs, are the other major focal point for rural women. In addition to providing moral and sometimes financial support, such groups are for many women the only source of social diversion from the routine of their daily lives. Although these church structures do not normally exhibit an overtly "woman-centred" interest, it is indisputable that they succeed in reaching the largest numbers of rural women. This fact has been recognised by many mainstream women's organizations which have cooperated with church structures, but without having substantially influenced the issues which are taken up by the church groups.

Further mobilisation of rural women is hampered by a range of constraints, including a heavy workload exacerbated by the absence of appropriate technologies, and resistance on the part of male members of the family who fear that organizational involvement by women might threaten their position of power and authority. Some community activists have noticed a general "dependency-syndrome" which encourages rural residents to expect that improvements in their situation will come from "the government" or from donor agencies in the wake of independence. The general apathy which this attitude inspires has affected women's attitudes and their level of participation in women's organizations.

The Department of Women Affairs is endeavouring to play a coordinating role for the wide variety of groups operating in rural and urban areas. It has faced serious difficulties in balancing the enormous expectations coming from government as well as from the public against the reality of a small staff and a limited budget -- while at the same time being advised by a number of donor agencies, all with their own ideas about the ideal approach. After inviting a range of organizations to several workshops to discuss strategy, the DWA has wisely chosen to focus on networking and facilitating functions rather than the direct implementation of projects. {46}

For example, the DWA tries to coordinate the activities and projects of existing women's groups and NGOs, to put these groups in touch with appropriate government ministries and donors, and to undertake needs assessments as a basis for project initiation. {47} It has also made the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women a focal point for a communications strategy which is designed to encompass conscientisation and action on a range of gender issues. {48}

Because of its location within a SWAPO government, the DWA is perceived as being SWAPO-oriented by some, in spite of the fact that it works with a broad range of women's organizations. The DWA has also been criticised for not including all groups which are active around gender issues within its orbit; there is a perception that some groups are favoured, while other groups are intentionally shunned. {49} Another widespread criticism is that the DWA has failed to establish adequate mechanisms for accountability (such as regular meetings to report back on international conferences).

Criticisms such as these can be viewed as a sign of a healthy dialogue between state structures and an active and vital NGO community; the government is clearly not going to be allowed to shape the women's movement unilaterally. The DWA itself seems to have become increasingly sensitive to such criticisms, and it is attempting to give a greater appearance of openness and inclusiveness to its current efforts to prepare for the 1995 World Conference in Beijing.

At the same time, the DWA has had to struggle for meaningful recognition within government. For example, it is still not consistently consulted on legislation and policies which include critical gender components, and there is no DWA representative at Cabinet level, not even as an observer.

Most importantly perhaps, the DWA, like other formal women's groups, is fundamentally Windhoek-based. While the DWA and many other women's groups have made efforts at outreach, limited time and resources have prevented such attempts from being consistent enough or thorough enough to be effective. {50}

While there is a general recognition that the DWA has been performing admirably under difficult circumstances, there is still a widespread opinion that more attention should be paid to the Department's rural constituency. Notwithstanding DWA's intended role as a "mouthpiece" for Namibian women, it is not seen as having sufficiently articulated and acted upon rural concerns and priorities. Rural women are also alienated from the processes which take place in the urban centres, feeling that they are excluded from policy debates and uninformed about their outcomes. It has been suggested that the DWA needs to adopt a more aggressive approach in rural areas where women lack effective channels of information and communication, both in keeping women informed about relevant matters and in relaying their concerns back to the government and to the rest of the women's movement.

The same criticisms of rural neglect which are levelled at the DWA can be applied with equal force to most other Windhoek-based women's groups; the fact remains that the majority of Namibian women are still isolated from the mainstream women's movement. Moreover, this is a problem which is not confined to the rural areas. For example, preliminary results of a survey of women in Windhoek, including women in the former "coloured" township of Khomasdal and the former black township of Katutura, indicate that most grassroots women even in the capital city are simply unaware of the activities of DWA or any of the Windhoek-based women's groups, with community activity centring mainly around local church groups. Furthermore, women who have heard of one women's organization or another tend to feel that these groups are only for educated women, and those few women who have attended meetings of one group or another say that they felt isolated and intimidated by the level of the discourse or the use of English. {51}

At the same time, an abiding racism complicated by class distinctions continues to divide women in these communities; for example, middle-class "coloured" women, who seem to be one of the groups most thoroughly neglected by the women's movement, were found to expect long hours of work for low wages from their black domestic workers. {52}

With the exception of a few progressive thinkers, white women are also largely absent from the women's movement. This is partly a result of the apartheid era, in the sense that white women, and even working-class white women, are perceived as being relatively privileged -- a factor which makes them reticent about asserting their interests in the context of the larger women's movement and makes some black women suspicious of their involvement. Furthermore, not much time has passed since the days when most of Namibia's white population was intent on preserving the status quo, producing a general conservatism which was incompatible with fundamental changes in gender relations.

Since less than five years have passed since independence, it is perhaps understandable that the vestiges of the pre-independence racial divide still remain. While there is more "inter-racial" meeting and mixing than before, this is still largely confined to a small group of educated, middle-class Namibians. For the majority, even though racial barriers are no longer legally enforced, they still exist. This makes it difficult for most women to meet and to organize across racial lines.

Thus, the driving engine of the women's movement at this stage is a small urban elite dominated by educated black women who have achieved some impressive and well-intentioned results, but who have not yet managed to transcend the barriers of race and class to extend the women's movement to the majority of the population.

Emerging priority issues

At a 1991 conference organized by the Department of Women Affairs and attended by women from all parts of Namibia, the major women's needs identified were: * more access to formal and informal education; * more income-generating activities, together with increased access to economic resources such as land and credit; * reduction of the time-consuming domestic workload, especially in the rural areas; * action to reduce violence against women; and * information and resources which could lead to improved health and nutrition. {53}

Additional problems which were commonly cited by women in the regions of Namibia visited by representatives of the DWA in 1990-1991 included: the need for more child care and pre-school facilities; alcohol abuse; lack of access to adequate water supplies; housing shortages; and the lack of adequate transportation and communication facilities. {54}

A subsequent conference convened by DWA in 1992 analysed discrimination against women in nine priority areas: law and property ownership, education, labour and unemployment, poverty and income generation, family life, fertility and reproduction, violence against women, care of the aged and general gender awareness. {55}

The problems which have been identified stem, not only from the position of women compared with that of men, but from the persisting social and economic impact of apartheid and underdevelopment during colonial rule. Not surprisingly, women are primarily concerned about the general conditions of life which affect them and their families.

The continued existence of discriminatory and inadequate laws has been a frequent focus of discussion, and issues which have been identified as priorities for law reform are another indicator of women's concerns. {56} For example, one of the most frequently cited problems is maintenance (child support), which is an economic issue as much as a legal issue. This problem reflects the frequent failure of fathers to take financial (or emotional) responsibility for their

children, a pattern of behaviour which is common in Namibia. Another often-cited priority area is the nexus of family law issues which includes marriage, divorce, inheritance and domestic violence (a widespread but little-talked about problem). {57}

In general, violence against women -- widespread rape and domestic violence, as well as the impact of more generalised crime and violence -- is a common problem which cuts across race and class lines, and has been identified as a priority in both urban and rural areas. As one of the few issues which has inspired consistent grassroots action, this area of concern has functioned as a key mobilising issue for a number of organizations and has inspired several public protests in Windhoek and other locations. {58}

Another issue of growing and widespread concern is the need for more access to family planning services. Prior to independence, the issue of family planning was complicated by a general political debate around population control, as blacks argued that family planning was being vigorously advocated and implemented in black communities but not amongst whites; this was seen as a government strategy to control black numbers. Since independence, the issue has become depoliticised. Birth rates in the black communities are still high, and many men and women continue to define women as mothers. But increasing numbers of women are beginning to question the fact that the Namibian concept of womanhood is so closely bound up with fertility, and to challenge male resistance to the use of birth control. {59}

As already noted, rural women also have certain needs which are peculiar to their experiences. Improvement of the economic position of women has already been highlighted as a fundamental rural priority; although this need is shared by many urban women, it is perhaps even more pressing in the tenuous economy of rural households. There is also an urgent need for improved agricultural extension services for rural women, who remain the primary producers in the area of subsistence agriculture.

Access to clean water and adequate sanitation is another major concern of rural women; because the fetching of water is seen as "women's work", the time and distance involved in collecting water become "women's problems". Lack of water and sanitation are also key contributing factors to the health problems of women and children. {60}

The position of women under customary laws and practices is also an area of major concern to rural women, particularly women in the northern parts of Namibia. The position of widows, who often lose all their land and property to the family of the deceased, has been a matter of particular worry. Access to land by women in their own right is often cited as a priority. Some rural women are also concerned about their exclusion from traditional decision-making structures such as headmen's courts.

In the southern regions, rural women often cite as a priority a nexus of interrelated family and social problems which includes unemployment, alcohol abuse and family violence. An additional problem is an intensified feeling of exclusion; where rural development projects have been initiated, they have tended to focus on the northern regions of Namibia. {61}

Aside from the income-generating programmes sponsored by various NGOs and some church involvement in addressing social problems, many of the priority issues which are specific to rural women have been addressed (if at all) by government ministries and donor agencies rather than by women's groups. While the mainstream women's movement has acknowledged in principle the importance of including the concerns of rural women, there has been little concrete action on the ground to back up this conviction. As a result, it is not surprising that rural women do not generally view the women's movement as a primary vehicle for the assertion of their needs.

Similar comments would apply to the attitude of many grassroots women in the urban areas. In order to attract a broader following, the women's movement must prove that it can produce tangible results on issues which concern a wider range of the nation's women.

Characteristics, strengths and weaknesses

It must be remembered that the Namibian women's movement is a nascent one which is difficult to characterise. Nevertheless, a few generalisations can be made. For instance, "feminism" is an unpopular word in Namibia. Many women apply feminist analysis without labelling it as such, to avoid unnecessarily alienating people who attach negative connotations to the term. While pragmatic attention to specific problems has been seen as more urgent than academic theorising, some confusion has stemmed from the co-existence of "women in development" and "gender" approaches, with "gender" still being an unfamiliar concept to many.

Gender issues have understandably had to compete with a number of other issues for attention in a nation which is busy building itself anew. Namibia has in general been inundated with well-meaning and generous donors, many of whom have given special priority to matters relating to gender. This has proved to be a mixed blessing, however, as the independent agendas of donor agencies sometimes overlap and conflict with those of other donor agencies, as well as those of women's groups; although the aims of donor agencies have for the most part been consistent with those of women's organizations, donors often set differing priorities and a different pace. Furthermore, Windhoek is beginning to suffer from conference fatigue; multiple workshops and seminars, often donor-sponsored, tend to bring together much the same group of people over and over again, and adequate follow-up mechanisms are seldom established.

The Windhoek-based women's movement is characterised by the high visibility of a few prominent women involved in multiple endeavours. There has not yet been a single focus for mobilisation strong enough to involve women more broadly. It is unlikely that preparation for Beijing will serve this function; in fact, Beijing could well function as an interruption to the more pressing business of internal organization and action on the ground. To date, while a few individual women have had contact with international women's organizations, this has not generally filtered through to Namibian women's groups in any meaningful way.

Some of the difficulties faced by the women's movement have been noted. The challenge of articulating a feminism which will encompass the needs and aspirations of women ranging from subsistence farmers to urban professionals is immense. The women's movement is still searching for a way to bridge the gap between grassroots women and the educated elite, as well as the gap between Windhoek and the rest of the nation. The continuing divisiveness of race, class, ethnicity and political persuasion constitutes a serious obstacle to united action. An additional constraint is the personal competitiveness which sometimes prevents women from supporting other women (although this problem is gradually improving), and a similar sort of organizational competitiveness which encompasses competition for members, influence and donor funds. In addition, even the most active women are still in the process of strengthening their networking, lobbying and strategising skills.

Yet, despite these problems, the women's movement also has some significant strengths -- such as individual women with untiring personal commitment to the advancement of women; a slowly-increasing consciousness amongst Namibian women of the impact of gender discrimination on their daily lives; and a receptive national climate with a growing level of gender sensitivity amongst policy-makers. It is also a hopeful sign that younger Namibian women and men seem to be less divided by the experiences of the past than their parents, with less deeply-entrenched gender stereotypes; it is no coincidence that one of the most successful integrations of gender issues into broader concerns is in NANSO, the leading organization in the students' movement.

The women's movement has clearly matured and evolved in the few short years since independence. There is still a need for more organization around specific projects instead of attempting to organize "women" to address the entire spectrum of "women's issues" at once, and there is an even more critical need to create spaces in which all Namibian women can assert their own priorities in their own ways. However, even though the women's movement is only reaching a small minority of women at present, it has already had a significant impact on national politics and it has the potential to become a vibrant and powerful force in Namibia.

NOTES

1. Population figures are from a government census conducted in 1991. Namibia's land mass is 824,295 square kilometers (318,180 square miles), compared to England which has a population of some 55.5 million in an area of 130,360 square kilometers (50,320 square miles). Estimates of the number of distinct ethnic groups in Namibia vary, depending on how these are defined; literature on Namibia commonly refers to Baster, Caprivian, Coloured, Damara, Owambo, Kavango, Kaokoland, Herero, Nama, Tswana, San and White groupings.

2. In the 1960's a Commission appointed by the South African government recommended the consolidation of existing native reserves in order to create "a permanent and stable homeland for each of the various population groups", with a view to working towards an increasing degree of self-government for each. Republic of South Africa, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into South West Africa Affairs 1962-1963.

After the idea of full self-government was dropped in response to international pressure, second-tier authorities were authorised for the eleven "population groups" of Basters, Bushmen, Caprivians, Coloureds, Damaras, Hereros, Kavangos, Namas, Owambos, Tswanas, and Whites. Representative authorities were established for all of these "population groups" except Bushmen, who had no formal governing structure, and Basters, who had a slightly different form of autonomy.

3. Other groups which were active in the liberation struggle included the Herero Chief's Council and the South West African National Union (SWANU).

4. For instance, SWAPO made a strong showing in the 1992 regional and local government elections, and a number of leaders from other political parties have chosen to join SWAPO in the past few years.

5. For example, the nation's largest trade union federation is formally affiliated to SWAPO, while the major students' organization suffered a split over its decision to disaffiliate from SWAPO. There are two different umbrella bodies for NGOs, each with a different political profile even though neither has any formal ties to any party.

6. This point should not obscure the fact that only a small proportion of exiled Namibians (perhaps 15%) underwent comprehensive post-secondary school training. Many returning Namibians have faced severe difficulties in finding employment and in reintegrating themselves into Namibian society. See, for example, Chris Tapscott, "Namibia: A Class Act?", Southern Africa Report (November 1991), pp. 3-6; Chris Tapscott & Ben Mulongeni, An Evaluation of the Welfare and Prospects of Repatriated Namibians in Northern Namibia (Namibia Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Namibia, Windhoek, 1990).

7. In 1991, the population of Windhoek was estimated at 150 000, although this figure could have grown to 200 000 by 1992 due to migration caused by the drought. Windhoek is approximately 8

times larger than its nearest urban rival, Rehoboth, and accounts for about one-third of the nation's entire urban population. Bruce Frayne, *Urbanisation in Post-Independence Windhoek* (Namibian Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Namibia, February 1992); UNICEF/NISER, *A Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Namibia* (Windhoek, March 1991), p. 20.

8. For political purposes, the nation is divided up into 13 different regions, each with its own elected regional council. Local authorities, classified as municipalities, towns or villages, depending on their size and level of development, exist within each region.

9. This point is a debatable one. Namibia's Constitution prohibits discrimination on ethnic grounds, and this prohibition seems to have been obeyed since independence. Some of SWAPO's opponents have attempted to discredit the party by accusing it of being unfairly biased towards Owambos. On the other hand, others have argued that Owambos are entitled to special attention since most of the fighters in SWAPO's liberation army came from this group. Furthermore, the fact that donors have tended to focus on the Owambo regions has given rise to a perception that Owambos are a privileged group in some respects.

10. It has also been estimated that some 70% of the population attend church regularly.

11. In rural Namibia, especially in the parts of northern Namibia which fell within the operational area during the liberation war, the church provided a safe meeting place, as well as various forms of practical and symbolic support.

12. To cite only one example, the 1993 Christmas message from the General Secretary of the Council of Churches in Namibia condemns violence against women and discrimination against women and children -- while at the same time denouncing the legalization of prostitution, abortion, "condom culture" and "explicit sex-education in schools". Rev Ngeno Nakamela, "Spiritual matters: Christmas message from CCN", *The Namibian*, 17 December 1993.

13. For example, plans to restore the "kingdom" of one ethnic grouping were altered after widespread criticism from prominent government leaders and a Cabinet statement expressing opposition to the concept of ethnic "kings" and "kingdoms". See *The Namibian*, 4 and 18 October 1993. See also Republic of Namibia, Report by Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Chiefs, Headmen and Other Traditional or Tribal Leaders (Windhoek, 1991), pp. 8-9, where it is affirmed that the "concept of a Nation must prevail over that of a tribe or ethnic group".

14. It is also problematic that the situation of women in pre-colonial Namibia has been documented primarily by missionaries and travellers, most of whom were European men with their own gender biases.

15. Heike Becker, "From Anti-Colonial Resistance to Reconstruction: Namibia Women's Movement 1980 to 1992", doctoral dissertation, University of Bremen (mimeo, 1993), pp. 41-60. (This thesis provides an extremely useful and detailed synthesis of information about the women's movement.)

Information about the changing gender dynamics in particular communities is available in a number of sources, some of the more recent of which include: Megan Bieseke, *Women Like Meat: The folklore and foraging ideology of the Kalahari Ju/'hoan* (Witwatersrand University Press/Indiana University Press, 1993); Gordon D. Gibson, Thomas J. Larson & Cecilia R. McGurk, *The Kavango Peoples* (Franz Steiner Verlag, 1981); Robert J. Gordon, *The Bushman Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass* (Westview Press, 1992); Margaret Jacobsohn, *Himba -- Nomads of Namibia* (Struik, 1980); Karla O. Poewe, *The Namibian Herero: A history of their psychological disintegration and survival* (The Edward Mellon Press, 1985); Frieda-Nela Williams, *Pre-colonial Communities of Southwestern Africa: A History of Owambo Kingdoms 1600-1920* (National Archives of Namibia, 1991).

16. For more information on the gender impact of migrant labour, see Ndeutala Hishongwa, *The Contract Labour System and its Effects on Family and Social Life in Namibia: A Historical Perspective* (Gamsberg Macmillan, 1992).
17. Department of Economic Affairs, "Manpower Survey" (Windhoek, 1988). This survey reported that 46% of all women in formal employment were classified as service workers. The regional imbalances in the distribution of wage employment have exacerbated the lack of formal sector opportunities for women. In 1988, Windhoek, with less than 10% of the total population provided 41% of formal sector jobs, while the Owambo region which was home to approximately 45% of the total population accounted for only 6% of formal sector employment. See Dianne Hubbard & Chris Tapscott, *Country Gender Analysis Namibia* (SIDA, December 1991), pp. 13-ff.
18. Although the laws supporting migrant labour were repealed in 1978, this employment pattern persists in the post-independence era, as a result of the fact that wage employment is still centred in Windhoek and in area-specific enterprises such as mining, fishing and commercial agriculture. The absence of women in formal sector employment has produced a corresponding male dominance of the trade union movement, while making income-generating activities for women an important focus of mobilisation for women's groups.
19. For example, during a war of resistance to German rule in 1904-5, Herero women used their reproductive power as a weapon by vowing not to bear children until German rule had ended. In later years, black urban women defied the pass laws imposed on them by the colonial administration. Women also played a leading role in a seminal struggle against the forced removal of blacks to ethnically-segregated townships in 1959 -- an event which was an important catalyst for the crystallization of the nascent liberation movements.
20. See, for example, Tessa Cleaver & Marion Wallace, *Namibia-Women in War* (Zed, 1990); Denis Herbstein & John Evenson, *The Devils are Among Us: The War for Namibia* (Zed Books, 1989); Manfred Hinz and Nadia Gevers, *Koevoet versus the People of Namibia* (Working Group Kairos, Utrecht, 1989).
21. During the early years of the liberation struggle, SWAPO and SWANU sometimes coordinated their efforts, such as in the Old Location protest in 1959. However, attempts at uniting the two movements were not successful.
22. The CCN was established in 1978, with eight different denominations among its original members. The CCN Women's Desk, which was established in 1987, has focused on income-generating projects and educational programmes, as well as providing opportunities for women from churches in different regions to come together to discuss issues of common interest.
23. The establishment of the NWV grew out of the first national women's conference in Namibia, convened in June 1985 by a steering committee of church women who were spearheading the establishment of an ecumenical group. This conference drew together almost 300 women from all parts of the country to discuss a broad range of issues, including possible structures for a community-based women's organization. (See Becker at p. 156 for more details.)
24. Under colonial population control policies, Depo Provera injections were often forced on Namibian women without their consent.
25. The colonial regime established a number of groups which organised cultural, religious and sports activities at a local level, to provide platforms for the spread of propaganda. The NWV helped to raise community awareness of the true aims of these groups.

26. More details about the NWV are available in Becker at pp. 155-ff and in Cleaver & Wallace at pp. 89-ff.
27. See, for example, Bience Gawanas, "Namibian Independence" in Susan Bazilli, ed., *Putting Women on the Agenda* (Raven Press, 1991), p. 249.
28. Namibian Constitution, Article 23(3). Article 10(2) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status.
29. Namibian Constitution, Article 14(1).
30. Namibian Constitution, Article 66(1). The same is true of the common law in force at the date of independence.
31. Namibian Constitution, Article 140(1).
32. The role of the DWA and some of the challenges which it faces will be discussed below.
33. For example, there were only 7 women in Namibia's two houses of Parliament at the end of 1993: 6 women amongst the 72 elected members of the National Assembly and only 1 woman amongst the 26 members of the National Council. Only 3 out of 95 seats on Namibia's 13 regional councils were filled by women in the 1992 elections. Furthermore, in 1993 only 2 out of 18 ministers were women.
34. For a detailed study of the operation of this affirmative action provision, see Dianne Hubbard and Kaveri Kavari, *Affirmative Action for Women in Local Government in Namibia* (Legal Assistance Centre, Windhoek, 1993). The statutory provision applied only to the first local government elections which were held at the end of 1992; in subsequent local elections, voters will select individual candidates rather than political parties.
35. For example, the affirmative action provision in the Local Government Act was sponsored by one of Namibia's woman ministers. Women parliamentarians have used their positions to encourage parliamentary debate on issues of particular interest to women.
36. The regular meetings of this steering committee took place in Windhoek. While many of the groups involved operated outside of Windhoek as well, no regional representatives were involved in the deliberations. There was a plan to invite women from all parts of the country to a launching meeting which would make final decisions on the aims and structure of the umbrella body, but the initiative fell apart before this launch took place.
37. The catalyst for the breakdown was disagreement on how many representatives would be allocated to the various women's groups at the launch of the umbrella body.
38. For example, various women's groups have worked together to commemorate significant days, such as International Women's Day and Namibia Women's Day on 10 December. On International Women's Day in 1993, ten organizations signed a petition to the Minister of Justice demanding legal and social reform in a number of areas relating to women. The issue of unity amongst women was discussed by prominent women leaders from Windhoek in a television talk show, "Talking Point", on 5 October 1993, where there was unanimous agreement that it is legitimate for women to organize into various groupings which can coordinate their efforts when necessary.
39. There are also a few smaller women's organizations with broad agendas. One example is the Namibia Women's Association, a group which is active in Windhoek and the southern parts of Namibia around income-generating activities and community-run pre-primary schools.

40. The Windhoek branch was the first to be established, in 1992. It has since stimulated the formation of similar groups in other locations and provided follow-up support.

41. Although gender issues in general have not been high on the overall trade union agenda, it is noteworthy that some male-dominated unions have entered into collective agreements which include provisions for maternity leave, and that the nation's major trade union federation took a strong stand on the issue of maternity leave during negotiations around the new Labour Act which came into force in November 1992. See International Labour Organization, *Namibian Women and Employment: Strategies and policies for the promotion of equal opportunity and treatment for women and men in employment in Namibia* (ILO, 1992).

42. UNICEF/NISER, *A Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Namibia* (Windhoek, March 1991), p. 20.

43. The large number of female-headed households is another consequence of the extensive migration of male members of the family in search of wage employment. For example, a recent UNICEF survey of three rural areas in northern Namibia found that the percentage of female-headed households ranged from 40% to 49%. UNICEF, *Household Health and Nutrition in Namibia* (Windhoek, 1990).

44. This is a function both of the interests of the women concerned and the availability of funds, as many donors are inclined to support such "traditional" schemes rather than "risk" backing an unconventional project which might fail because it is "culturally unacceptable".

45. A national land conference organized by the government in June 1991 highlighted the need for affirmative action for women in the areas of land ownership, inheritance, training, and credit, and resolved that women should be fairly represented on all future bodies which administer communal land. However, these principles have yet to be translated into action. Similarly, while the government has repeatedly expressed its commitment to changing aspects of the laws on marriage which hamper women's economic capacity, such changes have not yet been forthcoming.

46. The DWA has provided grants to various income-generating projects, particularly in the rural areas, but has found that its limited capacity makes adequate evaluation and follow-up of such projects impossible.

47. More detailed information about the DWA's activities is available in Maria Kapere (Under-Secretary, DWA) "Report of the Department of Women Affairs to the Inaugural Annual Sharing Forum of Agencies Engaged in Promotion of the Status of Women (Mariental, November 14-19, 1993)", mimeo (DWA, 1993).

48. See DWA, *National Communication Strategy in support of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1993-1995* (DWA, July 1993).

49. The DWA has a list of twenty-two different women's groups with which it regularly networks. However, other groups which attempt to play a networking role make use of a wider pool of contacts.

50. Since its inception, the DWA has been aware of the importance of supporting rural women, who have traditionally had little access to any real decision-making structures. However, the DWA's role in the rural areas has been so far restricted mainly to supporting various income-generating initiatives, by assisting with the formulation of project proposals, assessing project viability and negotiating for donor funds on behalf of project members. The DWA has also provided direct support -- such as the donation of equipment -- and organized a few training programmes in

basic business and management skills. However these efforts have reached only a small number of rural women.

51. Although English is the official language of Namibia, Afrikaans is still the primary lingua franca and many people are clearly comfortable only in their home languages. Even where translation is offered, some women say that they feel embarrassed that the proceedings are being slowed down for their benefit.

52. One of the few groups in which women in Khomasdal are active is a local body which addresses community needs by, for example, providing a soup kitchen for hungry children and caring for the sick and the elderly. Information based on preliminary observations from 240 interviews conducted by the Department of Political Studies, University of Namibia, Windhoek, under the direction of W.L. Wanzala. The findings of this survey are expected to be formally tabulated and published during 1994.

53. The major contributing factors to women's problems were identified as: * the negative projection of women in traditional culture and the modern media; * the low status of women in terms of traditional institutions and values; * laws still in force which discriminate against women; and * insufficient attention to the promotion of women in decision-making positions by government and other institutions. DWA, National Priorities for Women in Development in Namibia (DWA, 1992). Although almost all the major regions of Namibia were represented, the majority of the conference participants were Windhoek-based.

54. DWA, "Report on visits paid to the regions by the Department of Women Affairs", mimeo (DWA, 1992).

55. DWA, National Communication Strategy in support of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1993-1995 (DWA, July 1993). Again, most of the participants at this conference were from Windhoek.

56. In fact, women in Namibia may be placing overly high expectations on what can be accomplished through law reform. While legal changes will certainly be important for women, they are unlikely in themselves to bring about the desired transformations in social and family life. It should also be noted that some legal issues have become priorities because of pending legislation, with the women's movement taking up certain topics at particular times in response to government proposals, instead of influencing the government's agenda.

57. The issue of inheritance is particularly acute for women in some communities, where a widow may be deprived of her home, her land and virtually all of her property upon the death of her husband. In advance of comprehensive law reform in this area, Parliament passed a resolution appealing to traditional leaders to show more compassion for the plight of widows, particularly during the current drought.

58. Violence against women has been the key issue for Women's Solidarity, a small Windhoek-based service organization, and for Concerned Women Against Violence Against Women, a grassroots organization active in several towns. Violence against women has also been addressed by groups with much broader agendas -- partly because it is such an effective issue for mobilising women.

59. The nationwide fertility rate for Namibia was estimated as 5.7 in 1990. However, this total conceals regional variations in family size; for example, one survey found a fertility rate of 5.2 in Katutura (the former black township adjacent to Windhoek), as compared with 6.4 in Owambo communities in the north of the country. In 1991, the percentage of married women using any form of birth control was estimated as being only 18.4%. Helena Ahrenson-Pandikow, Survey of Attitudes Towards the Use of Contraceptives in Namibia, Namibian Institute for Social and

Economic Research in Namibia (Windhoek, March 1992), p. 44; UNICEF/NISER, A Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Namibia (Windhoek, March 1991), p. 70.

60. In 1990, it was estimated that 53% of the population had no access to clean water and 77% had inadequate sanitation facilities. This situation was clearly linked to the high incidence of gastro-intestinal disease which produced high levels of infant mortality. UNICEF/NISER, A Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Namibia (Windhoek, March 1991), p. 88.

61. The majority of Namibia's population is resident in the north of the country. However, it is also possible that the northern regions receive more attention from donor agencies because of the fact that they suffered the most direct forms of war damage. As noted above, some people also believe that the SWAPO government gives priority to Oshiwambo-speaking areas in the north because so much of SWAPO's membership is drawn from this population.

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Women's Subcommittee
Namibia National Students' Organization
Box 22013
Windhoek
contact: Selma Nangolo
tel: 061-213091
fax: 061-213093

Namibian Women's Association
Box 3771
Windhoek
contact: Otille Abrahams or Catherine Sasman
tel: 061-211742
fax: 061-212379

Namibia Development Trust
Box 8226
Windhoek
contact: Lindi Kozambaue
tel: 061-38002/3 or 36021
fax: 061-33261

Women's Desk
National Union of Namibian Workers
Box 50034
Windhoek
tel: 061-215043
fax: 061-215589

Sister Namibia
Box 40092
Windhoek
contact: Joy Sasman
tel: 061-230618 or 230757
fax: 061-36371

Women's Solidarity
Box 23941
Windhoek
contact: Gisela !Hoases
tel: 061-62275 or 215948

Young Women's Christian Association
Box 21445
Windhoek
contact: Nelago Kondombolo
tel: 061-63484
fax: 061-63484

Political Party Wings

DTA Women's League
Box 173
Windhoek

SWAPO Women's Council
Box 1071
Windhoek

FCN Women's League
Box 60952
Windhoek

NPF Women's League
Box 3676
Windhoek

NUDO Women's League
Box 5050
Windhoek

UDF Women's League
Box 10388
Windhoek

SWANU Women's League
Box 6135
Windhoek

Working & Peasant Women's Association
Box 1213
Windhoek

CAPTIONS FOR PHOTOS FOR NAMIBIA CHAPTER

Women were members of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia which led the liberation struggle to free Namibia from South African rule. Photo: John Liebenberg

Windhoek women in a street demonstration protesting against the high incidence of rape and other crimes in June 1992. Photo: Jean Sutherland