

INTRODUCTION

Swaziland is a feudal state the only absolute monarch in the world located in the Southern tip of Africa between Mozambique and South Africa. It is not just a tiny country with an estimated population of 1, 3 million but a slave cage with gross human rights violation, corruption and parasitism, sexism and gender based violence which swim in the yoke of abuse of culture and traditional values throttled by the royal aristocracy. Having said this low women empowerment is one of leading factors hampering human development. The absence of women from structures of governance inevitable means decisions are taken without meaningful contribution from women whose life experience in communities give them different awareness of needs ,concerns and interest compared to that of men. This is our condition in Swaziland.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Even though the country was part of states that set their millennium development goals(MDGs) in 2008 lead by SADC Protocol on Gender and Development that aimed at 50% women representation in parliament by 2015 we only have one female member of parliament elected in 2013 elections. The constitution does give powers to individuals to stand for elections even women, but there is a conflicting scenario as to qualify for the elections you must be approved by your local chief who is the first layer in the traditional pyramid which hold strong views against women and treat women as second class citizen. In the run-up to elections a woman who was widowed aspiring to be Member of Parliament was condemned to participate in the elections by community authorities siting that she is BLACK (in mourning gown). The civil society criticized his utterances that they undermine human rights, the traditional leader (chief) of that community responded by saying Swaziland doesn't worship a paper (constitution). Advocating for women representation is the civil society composed of political parties and NGOs that advocate for gender equality or either promotes women's rights. The whole political administration is dominantly male taking women to positions of private secretaries. Swaziland has the lowest number of women representation in the SADC region. The distributions of seats according to sex is men =61 while females are 4 making a percentage 6.15%. Out of 20 people the monarch appoints only 3 women to join his parliament which seriously exposes

the lack of desire to in cooperate women to public affairs. Even in opposition forces women are at most minimum level yet policies of many of this political formations are more than women friendly, allows anyone to be voted within according to her capabilities.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Women are most discriminated as regard to economic ownership and control of means of production as land, capital, livestock and other assets. Crucial in this respect is ownership and control of land by women. The situation is that male heads have rights to access land thus making the insecurity of land tenure for women become an economic and legal concern. In the international arena where Swaziland participate is in SADC Fair and Investment forum which has objectives among others that seek to emancipate women economically but that commitment is not practiced. The country of approximately 31% of population who are employed 40% are males and 24% are females. Women are economically alienated as in where they are employed are underpaid, work under inhuman conditions making them vulnerable to sickness and abuse. In the clothing manufacturing places 90% of employees are women, this sector is one with gross abuse and exploitation of the women folk where they earn 50 euros a month subjecting the poor women to prostitution as means to find extra income at the process subjecting them to HIV. Economic emancipation of women is a far-fetched dream for Swazi women, SRWA in one of its founding objectives is emancipation of women economically as it workshops rural women with skills sharing.

It only managed to have women doing handcrafts work as they are from rural areas they quickly learn things which are primarily manufactured by hands. We envisage to organize other forums to look into ways for economic emancipation of women that will also meet the times we live in.

CULTURAL

At the heart of many challenges, backstabbing women progress is culture used as a political tool for manipulating women. There are three cultural angles that undermine women, the traditional form of marriage known as kuteka, the wife as an inheritance, the minority status given to women.

THE TRADITIONAL FORM OF MARRIAGE

Kuteka is a form of taking a wife in a traditional fashion, and the process towards that comes at a harsh and embarrassing way. One has to pay a visit to her boyfriend, and within the night a group of elderly women evade the room you are sleeping in, and takes you away to a kraal and perform all ritualistic things associated with the practice without your consent. Once you are taken or “tekaed” there is no divorce in the traditional marriage, it simple means you are chained in the imperfections of that men till the death of your life. Under this practice a right to self-determination, freedom of choice is halted to give your soul to a men whom by the same traditional law can take another wife or wives as long as he can. Mostly, women are left with no choice as room for fighting this is next to nothing since in courts it is not allowed to be reviewed it is sent to local authorities who are custodians of the same patriarchal practice and once you attempt to reject this marriage you are told at your own home that no one will look after you anymore and lack of knowledge of rights has been a problem in this situation for decades. Another form of marriage is the arranged type, whereby elders from the girl family decide whom to marry with no consultation from you to get your view on the matter.

THE WIFE AS INHERITANCE

Objectification of women has history in the development of society, but as much as some elements are abolished and outdated in other worlds, it is a different story in Swaziland. The wife is a property of the extended family of your husband. In case of your husband demise the family give the wife a brother of the husband usually termed “kungenwa”(literally translated “to enter”) in our native language. The justification is that the children of your late husband must be taken care of by a blood relative to avoid the husband’s estate to be used by an outsider. Many women under

this situation end up losing the property of the late husband as now she is governed by the imposed husband who controls the affairs of the whole family. This family arrangement is assault to women's rights, and this have also allowed the spread of HIV as no one even cared about the cause of death of the husband but the brother will continue engaging in sexual intercourse with the maybe infected widow. In case you attempt to reject, hauling of insults and accusations will be walking side by side with you till you abandon the family, once you decide to leave the family you leave with nothing.

MINORITY STATUS GIVEN TO WOMEN

Under the same guise of culture women come after male children. This has interrelations with ownership of land. It is now common knowledge that single women are not allowed to access land, homesteads carry a male surname. When an unmarried, divorced or widowed woman want to have land in the Swazi nation land where chiefs are in authority she is ordered to register the home by a boy child. If she doesn't have she must at least get married. In community forums women are not to use chairs during meetings in case she have a contribution she have to kneel while men stand during their contributions and when she puts a valid point, she will be appreciated that she talks like men reducing women and giving attributes of intellectualism to men.

SOCIAL CHALLENGES

The high HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is one sign to many social ills that come with economic alienation and being poorly skilled or educated a factor in our case. This have created huge problems of Orphans in communities as many people die of the epidemic and children are left with no one or abusive relatives. At most the burden of taking care of young ones is a women problem in our society. Unemployment has forced many women into prostitution, surprisingly in our country young girls at pre tertiary level are out in numbers practicing this trade as they say they want to pay school fees, or have money to buy food and other school needs and this girls are as young as 13 years old (reports the times of Swaziland). The total lack of land or finances to start business have increased women percentage involved in crime or trading of illicit products in our case dagga as it is hugely illegally planted. All this

problems are symptoms of our maladministration. This has led to feminization of poverty as the mostly affected are women.

FAMILY LIFE

Families in Swaziland range from extended families parents to the most unusually the child headed family. It is an old believe that breadwinners are males, but today within families you find a women feeding the family due divorce, separation or death of patner. Another type is the single headed parent family that one of the parents supports the children on his/her own due to maybe breakups within polygamous marriage, most single parents are women.

According to CIA FACTBOOK the household income is lowest 10%:1.7% and highest is 10%: 40.1% while the distribution of family income-GINI INDEX 50.4% this causes family life to be difficult.

MIGRATION

Women also participate in internal and external migration owing to our heavy dependence on South African industries and the search for greener pastures. Due to our poor state we hardly have statistics on the movement of women both within the country and outside.

There has been a strong indication that the number of female cross border migrants might soon surpass that of male migrant workers. The significant proportion of female cross border migrants is made up of informal traders who take handicraft goods from Swaziland to sell in different parts of South Africa. Once they have sold their items in South Africa the women use their proceeds to buy goods in Swaziland.

GENDER VIOLENCE

This has been one of the social ills that are a result of economic deprivation of our people, deep patriarchal orientation of our people and the well planned continuing sidelining of women in policy formulation and decision taking. Gender based violence is also one of the challenges that affect women and girls disproportionately.

According to UNICEF on National Study on Violence against Children and Young Women in Swaziland reports 35.6% women are raped by husband/boyfriend.

According to a survey in 2008 by government Central Statistics Office 18% of females aged between 13 and 44 years had contemplated suicide, primarily as a result of domestic violence. The issue of poverty and dependence of many women on men have normalized abuse. The weekly killings of women due to relationship problems is that even courts and community leaders doesn't take part in protecting women. There is a bill that seeks to address this problem but up to today it is not passed since 2015, the SEXUAL OFFENCES AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE BILL OF 2015 (CLAUSE 4, 10, 42 AND 47), as the traditional council says it clash with culture due to few clauses that criminalize incest, abduction, marital rape, stalking and flashing. Among rising crimes is human trafficking and body parts mutilation a crime that has history with Swazi women, as we have a serial killer named David Simelane who slaughtered more than 35 women and is still in prison given all the best treatment he requires.

PERSPECTIVES

To mobilize, organize, educate and unite Swazi women for their best future against all injustices and inequalities. We envision a just society with respect of women and girls' rights, allowing free democratic participation, empowerment, and holistic development of women. A nation that prioritizes the protection of mother earth and the people than profit.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUGGLES

SRWA support women's projects by building their capacity on self-help projects and income generating initiatives for economic independence. These are also used as forums for discussion on issues affecting their daily lives and how they can be overcome. SRWA also creates democratic space for rural women to come together and share experiences, advocacy skills and speak with a united voice. It also empowers women to challenge the status quo and train them to participate in decision making processes on issues that deal with their rights, interests and welfare. SRWA also lobbies and advocates for policies that promote and protect women and girls rights like currently the SODV BILL OF 2015. Struggles that

protects environment through agro-ecology and encourages food sovereignty also find great devotion and sense of responsibility from us. SRWA educates women on their rights using the Swazi constitution, marital rights and also encouraging women to have marriage certificates as mostly with the Swazi law and custom marriage certificate is not issued immediately. It works nationally in the four geographic regions of Swaziland with a particular focus in the rural areas as most marginalized women in society are in rural areas.

METHODS IN RURAL AREAS

SRWA depend on its trained volunteer organizers who are rurally based in implementing its set goals. We do community meetings, do door to door civic education, and meetings in places where women meets like in rivers, market place forest (for fire wood fetching). At times call for workshops, we also form community based organizations for women. Through of art staged performance we educate women on many different issues burning in that community or either of interest to SRWA we have managed to reach more women even the girl child.

LOCAL AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

SRWA is concerned with building partnerships and networks with like-minded organizations locally, regionally and internationally. Locally we have managed to work hand in hand with local farmers associations, women's group, NGOs and most awarding is organizing to join hand in fighting struggles, work together in campaigns especially the marches on land, food sovereignty, women's rights and climate justice. Regional we are members of Rural Women Assembly Southern Africa, On international level we have managed to get assistance technical and financial through our partner organization Foundation for Socio-economic Justice from ACTSA (big lottery fund) in the past and Afrika Kontakt currently.

CONCLUSION

Life of women in our country is increasingly becoming harder, with less protection by law, gender inequality and soft sentences to those perpetrators of crimes of women like rape, we will forever be in a circle of continuous massacre of our rights, deep state of poverty and preys to curable diseases. Though we see positive steps in SRWA capabilities of advocacy and demands of rights we still hope only continuous

education on our members and leadership broadening of skills can guarantee us of victory. This education must put in the center the girl child. Lot of measures still need to be placed by all concerned loving people of the world in different angles of the women issues in our country.

*****END*****

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