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RURAL WOMEN LEADERS: LATE COLONIAL AND CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

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RURAL WOMEN LEADERS: LATE COLONIAL AND CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

Studies of leadership, like studies of elites, are overwhelmingly of men, for various reasons. In some societies, women are formally excluded from community leadership; in others, the very recentness of women's participation in community leadership relegates their numbers to a minute few. Students of leadership often assume that men leaders represent women's interests as a whole, or women members of households. Yet neither women nor men may perceive that men will represent women's interests. In many African societies, women (and men) have common interests, resulting from the work they do, opportunity and resource disparities between the sexes, the division of income within households, and roles in reproduction. Male preference in the distributive process reinforces these different interests.[1] Furthermore, clan or territorial exogamy makes women strangers to a community, only gradually absorbed (if at all) into their husband's clan. Indigenous institutions in some African societies reinforce this separateness through the existence of formal, but parallel political structures, differentiated by sex and sex-related issues. Though women rarely exert authority over men, they quite commonly exercise authority over other women in agriculture, mutual aid, religion, and trade.[2] Even if no formal sex-differentiated hierarchy exists, men and women often have separate communication patterns, and most societies contain informal women's groups, integrated into the larger community context in varying degrees.[3]

Leaders, or those who have more power and influence than others within a group, are capable of making people behave differently than otherwise.[4] Past studies have emphasized either leadership characteristics or situations which give rise to group configurations and leadership patterns, seen as inseparable

in this paper. This study will compare women's groups in two community contexts of western Kenya, and women leaders which emerged from each, to explore organizational effectiveness in meeting women's needs. In both contexts, leaders formalized existing informal women's organizations to varying degrees, a process also explored in this study.[5] The "formalizers" as well as the level and terms on which formalization occurs, have crucial effects on the ability of organizations to meet member needs.

The first part of the paper describes the late colonial context and the emergence of a women's mobilization initiated by the chief in Shikulu sublocation. The woman designated "woman subchief" had neither precedent nor aftermath in the community. In the second part of the paper, the changed, contemporary political context is analyzed, along with the women's groups within it. Contemporary women leaders are compared with those of the woman subchief and her leadership corps. The conclusion analyzes the effects of leadership, context, and formalization processes for organizational effectiveness. Research for the paper was done in Idakho location, Kakamega District, in western Kenya from December, 1974, to June, 1975. Over fifty interviews were conducted to reconstruct the historical women's mobilization, supplemented by study of the sporadic references in the Kenya national archieves and district files.[6] Participant observation and interviews with members of current women's groups constitute sources for the contemporary analysis.

Umoja: The Late Colonial Context

Idakho location is populated by the Idakho, one of seventeen sub-groups of the Baluyia people whose economy is based on small-scale farming, cattle care, and out-migration (primarily male) for wage employment elsewhere in Kenya. The nature and locus of politics have changed dramatically during the twentieth

century. In the early part of the century, the British designated a paramount chief for all Baluyia, supplemented with chiefs for each subgroup who administered what are now known as locations. The British selected a chief for Idakho from the numerically dominant Bashimole clan, what some now term the "aristocratic clan." The Idakho chief was succeeded by his son, who administered Idakho until the time of independence. Concentrated and numerous administrative responsibilities as well as a high salary[7] meant the chief was able to wield substantial power over residents. By the late colonial period, this autocratic chief sponsored most or all organizations within the area, his restrictive policies buttressed by the colonial government which was at that time faced with rebellion in central Kenya.

By the mid-1950s, the chief's power had probably peaked, and subsequently concerted effort was necessary to maintain this decaying political base. Allegations of what people term "misbehavior,"--drunkeness, corruption, sexual harassment, and default on personal loans--contributed to this growing malaise. The chief's elegant life style, including several permanent (concrete floor and wall) houses, multiple wives, and an automobile, further festered this malaise.[8] In addition, the chief's drinking, support of the traditional sukuti dances, and polygamy offended influential protestants, (who tended to be wealthier and more educated than catholics and nonchristians), and they labeled these the practices of "pagans." Independence was approaching, and the development of new institutions, such as the legislative and county councils, struck at the absolute control over the location the chief and his father had maintained for so long. Not only would alternative representatives serve as crucial contacts, but political goods would later be distributed in these new political arenas. Several years prior to independence, the chief, however, still dominated local politics, given his ability to guide land reform processes and influence developmental activity in the area.

Luyia women work extensively in agricultural production, including planting, weeding, harvesting, processing, and trading crops, from which they not only derive some small income, but community and family status. The status associated with a clear role in production and some control over the fruits of production, along with their valued role in reproduction, probably accounts for a greater degree of equality between men and women than is true in other societies. In previous decades, women had participated in small informal groups, where agricultural labor was exchanged, as well as in church groups. Periodically, women had been called upon for public labor on the chief's farm and road repair.[9] With large numbers of men working elsewhere for wage employment (some of whom remitted money to Idakho), and with some women selling produce regularly and brewing beer to acquire incomes, women were increasingly seen as a potential part of the chief's power base, one that would support his troubled power structure. Not only were women numerically dominant, but they controlled cash resources.[10]

A sublocation-wide mobilization of women, known as Umoja,* was promoted by the chief, and nursed by the Community Development Assistant (soon to be subchief of Shikulu sublocation). In the pre-war period, government contacts with the community were primarily through men; women were not the clientele of functional ministries. Community development changed this orientation, and government focus on agriculture, soil, and land necessarily included women, since large numbers of men were away. The group was created because of the chief's pressing responsibility to oversee the consolidation of small, fragmented land plots for later registration. Once enclosed areas were agreed upon, boundaries were drawn, to be made permanent by hedges of euphorbia bush, known locally as venakotsi. In keeping with the sex division of labor, whereby

*Meaning "unity" in Swahili, but locally translated as "working together."

cultivation is a female task, women were called upon to tend venakotsi on a weekly basis, lasting over a year. Women leaders, respected in the informal female hierarchy, were also called upon to represent women in the formerly all-male government announcement meetings, known as barazas, and then to disseminate this information to women in the community.

Other organizational activities gradually displaced communal hedge-making, although representation continued with women leaders attending weekly chief and subchief barazas, and then communicating the information to local women's barazas. Umoja became a multipurpose organization, which enlarged, expanded, and monetized women's traditional activities. Most activities built on women's customary work and associational activities and were thus congruent with their pursuits, a factor which may have increased the receptivity of both men and women to Umoja.

Agricultural labor groups known as buhasio, which provided the framework for communal planting, weeding, and harvesting, had in the past numbered only several members, but expanded to twenty or more per clan and subclan during Umoja. Labor was contracted for a fee and fines were levied against absent women. In some neighborhoods, this money was divided at the year's end; in most, however, money was saved to meet Umoja's numerous community commitments and some leaders hoped to accumulate enough money to purchase a vehicle to be used for transporting women's produce. In the past, mutual aid had operated on an ad hoc, non-cash basis, within subclan and clan units, to assist persons during funerals and bridewealth exchange, when enormous amounts of food are required to serve visitors. During Umoja, cash collections were made on both ad hoc and regular bases. Cash was, on occasion, exchanged between kin units as well as, more commonly, within units. Women controlled the money gained

through Umoja; husbands had no authority over the cash. Thus, women were able to usurp some value over their own labor. Indeed, just placing a monetary amount on labor, heretofore unpaid, perhaps increased its value in peoples' minds.

The most significant transformation was the creation of women's courts, where women elders--instead of the customary male elders--judged women. Women elders heard cases about marital problems, disagreements among women, and the failure to submit to Umoja discipline. Female peer judgments did not mean standards about appropriate female behavior changed; women elders reportedly meted equal to harsher fines than did men elders for what people termed "lazy women" or "abusive wives." More minor transformations included pressuring the subchief for stricter implementation of drinking laws, as well as gaining mobility for required travel. On the former, the subchief was contacted to set stricter standards about drinking and beer selling, as women were thought to suffer most from "drunkard husbands." On the latter, women leaders had to attend meetings outside the sublocation at the chief's center. This represented a departure from norms and was negatively recalled by a male elder. "Men liked buhasio, but not women leaders. They did not like women walking from place to place and thought they might become harlots."

Women leaders were absorbed into the power structure through Umoja, filling a political vacuum for the chief. This process served the chief's interest in augmenting his political base, as well as in meeting administrative directives on land. With the community development philosophy permeating much of rural Kenya in the late 1950s and early 1960s, widespread community involvement in the unfolding land reform process reflected well on the chief. It is unlikely Umoja would have emerged without legitimization from the chief. Women

gained as well through this mobilization. Formerly, women exercised no formal authority and leadership in mixed-sex settings. With Umoja, two changes took place in the male council system: an institutionalized female voice, and the task of representing women's interests. Outside of community politics, women were provided with group-related agricultural services, in which both male and female staff lectured to special women's agricultural barazas, where seeds were occasionally distributed. In addition, part of the leadership corps was given financial support to attend short courses at the nearby Bukura Farmer Training Center, information from which they then transmitted to women's groups. Perhaps more importantly, Umoja provided a framework where women could transform and expand the organization to better meet their own needs. The wide array of group issues touched most aspects of women's lives.

Leadership: A Vacuum for Women

An increasingly commercialized agricultural system, some educational opportunity for women, and extended absence of men altered women's situation within the socioeconomic structure. Women were beginning to assume new economic responsibilities and more independent roles as de facto household heads. Yet women who had acquired the economic and personal resources to exert leadership had little opportunity to exercise this potential compared to men because of their sex. Umoja leaders usually had only a few years of schooling, unlike wealthier women, several of whom had some secondary education. A segment of the female population was receptive to the opportunities offered by Umoja, despite cooptive terms of the mobilization. Moreover, the increased complexity and monetization of group activity required internal hierarchy and new leadership roles.

Umoja leadership roles were adapted from three sources. From the colonial administrative system came the subchief, assistant subchief, and askari, (Swahili, for police). Each location, administered by a chief, contains five to ten sublocations, administered by subchiefs. The chief and subchief selected a "woman subchief," and she appointed an assistant subchief. (No "woman chief" existed.) At the clan and subclan level, a "woman askari," was responsible for calling women to work and overseeing their labor. The women askari wore whistles around their necks, a mark of authority. From the indigenous system came the "woman liguru" (plural: maguru) who was a neighborhood clan or subclan leader. The liguru role matched that of clan, subclan, and lineage heads, a role transformed during the colonial era to what is now the lowest unpaid government appointee who administers and communicates policy at the neighborhood level. In choosing woman maguru, the chief and subchief selected several candidates from each clan and subclan area, and then presented them to a women's baraza, where women lined up behind the candidate of their choice; the woman with the longest line was selected. Women maguru selected those who served under them. Trusted "women elders" were also chosen to judge women in the women's courts which developed during Umoja, a role which encroached upon the authority and income of male elders. Men elders had always questioned parties, assigned fines, and collected small fees. During Umoja, women shared this income-earning work. Finally, from the Department of Community Development came the treasurer and secretary roles, ordinarily filled by young literate women who kept attendance and fine records. Although some had more formal years of school than higher level leaders, their youth detracted from that status. Those women who failed to work were fined, backed by the authority of the women's courts, and ultimately, the chief.[11]

Wealthier women in the community disdained participation in communal labor, preferring instead to work on their farms or hire labor. They were either exempted, or regularly excused themselves through financial contributions to replace their labor. Many wealthier women were active protestants, alienated from the chief's polygamy, promotion of sukuti, and intemperance; they, further, had other avenues to status in the "Representative of Women" slots on committees, (discussed later). Wealthy women's voluntary exclusion from Umoja leadership probably increased the representativeness of existing leadership for the vast majority of women in the community.

Backgrounds of Umoja leaders provide some insight into its mesh with community politics. A good number had close marital or natal kin who commanded status. Several were married to men who served as maguru, and one was the daughter of a neighboring location chief. The woman subchief, quite significantly, married into a minority clan of the sublocation, but was born in Bushiangala, the dominant clan of the sublocation, and had a brother who was a liguru among the dominant clan. She was married to one of the earliest ministers in the area, a respected member of the community. In addition, however, she was active in the women's church group, sat on a Land Board, and was also a leading member of a Maendeleo center which operated for several years in the late 1950s. Her own natal kin were Bashiangala, as were those of the (male) subchief. Thus, she had been able to build a support base above and beyond purely marital factors, based on her own activities and on natal kin. This illustrates an important constraint facing women in exogamous, patrilineal systems. As in-marrying strangers, women must acquire or build a support base among a clan to which they are never fully integrated.[12]

Yet backgrounds alone do not guarantee leadership positions. A dynamic,

assertive personal style was also an essential ingredient for leadership, especially so for women without strong kin connections. One woman worked in the White Highlands prior to independence for wages, quite uncommon for women in Shikulu sublocation. Another woman participated in the then defunct Bunyore Women's Society, a short-lived organization that recruited women on female-ethnic terms, namely those women married into Shikulu from Bunyore location. Because it was created without his permission, the chief berated and publicly humiliated leaders of that society.[13] Still another Umoja leader was a "Mama Uhuru," who subsequently became head of the women's section of the Kenya African National Union sublocation branch.

Informants widely agreed upon leadership qualities. Women leaders were "not shy to visitors," and had to be able to "talk well" and "manage things." They were "reasonable" people. Others reported that good leadership depended on "how you talked" and if you could "attend meetings and report well." Male elders interviewed the woman subchief, given her special high rank, at the chief's center baraza and judged her on "how well she answered questions" and "knowledge of local history." Umoja leaders had strong, dynamic personalities; responsiveness, compromise, and ultimately, accountability were built into leadership qualities. Certain residents frowned upon women who "put themselves forward," especially when their behavior contrasted markedly from husbands.

There was a certain amount of rivalry for leadership positions. A contrast between two such rivals provides some insight into the diversity of leadership. The Mama Uhuru, referred to previously, was both a woman liguru and woman vice-subchief, though aspired to be woman subchief and according to some, "wanted to be above the (male) subchief." People's remarks suggest she questioned the constraints placed upon her as a woman. She once went to the district township

to ask the mayor (from a neighboring clan in the sublocation) for a sweeping job, and was told to get permission from her husband. Once she also complained about her husband at a church advisory group, and was advised that she had made her marital vows for life. Several years before this research, she had left the marriage, leaving several children behind--very unusual behavior given the requirement that children remain with their father.

In great contrast, the woman subchief epitomized a respected woman, and people find nothing to criticize about her. Rather than utilizing the more confrontational approach of the Mama Uhuru, she accepted the constraints she worked within and attempted to build on the strengths of women's traditional role. Yet this may have made her more amenable to chief and subchief influence. The woman subchief was, and still is, an awe-inspiring person, who commands a good deal of respect even until today. Her background, educational and personal resources, however, do not permit much influence in the present political context.

Umoja grew out of a relatively closed, authoritarian local power structure, threatened by growing criticism. Needing new bases of support, a women's bloc was formally incorporated at the center of community politics. The formalization process was set in motion by local powerholders, including the male hierarchy and women respected within that hierarchy, as well as among small, informal women's groups. Formalization occurred on familiar issues, with most positions culled from familiar roles as well. Perhaps more importantly, issues were congruent with women's work, and had the potential to meet a broad array of women's needs. While the women's courts set a dramatic departure from existing practices, the judicial model was indigenous and judgments conformed to prevalent ideas about proper female behavior. Though leaders were different from members, their life style, ideas, and educational experiences were not as distant from

ordinary women as those of wealthier women, excluded from participation by their own choice. Umoja collapsed after approximately two years, along with some of its functions, the reasons for which are explained elsewhere.[14] One important reason, however, was the set of compromises leaders made in coping with community and chief demands as well as demands from members. Through community donations and obligations, treasuries were nearly drained, alienating members who desired yearly redistribution of funds. In the end, women's gains in representation were temporary. Nevertheless, women constituted a very visible power bloc to themselves and to the chief. This legacy affects community perceptions of women and contemporary women's groups.

Informal Groups: Contemporary Context

This historical perspective party explains contemporary women's groups which operate on a scale smaller than that of Umoja, but larger than the pre-Umoja era, as well as on a monetized basis. No longer is there support for sublocation-wide leaders, either from the women, or from the new chief and subchief. Changes in the larger political context and differentiation among women account for this change.

Politics are no longer centered in the community, given the marginalization of chiefs, subchiefs, and community politics generally in contemporary Kenya. The central government has gradually usurped decision-making authority (which included financial decisions about health, education, and community development). A substantial number of chiefs were relieved of their office at independence, including the Idakho chief. For those that remained, salaries were reportedly cut to at least a third of chief salaries under colonialism, and their authority was severely curtailed. Numerous technical field staff of functional ministries have supplemented the chief's role in development.

Judicial responsibilities are shared with civil courts, land boards, and police. Political functions are managed by the District Officer, and head taxes are no longer collected. Subsequent chiefs have been from smaller clans in Idakho, a contrast from the half-century reign of the Bashimole chief and his son.

Corresponding with this marginalization of chiefs, power has become more dispersed from the local perspective. Politicians from other institutional arenas have more influence than the chief outside the location, and political goods are increasingly made available from sources and decisions outside the location. Administrators, too, make fundamental decisions at their own discretion or based on directives from higher levels which affect people's access to services and goods.[15] Finally, wealthy people have contacts outside the community which can often better aid residents than the chief in meeting their needs. Many new power contenders have emerged, at various levels of the political hierarchy, all vying with the contemporary chief. These new contenders tend to be more educated than the chief, and earn larger sums of money. Education and money are the crucial determinants of status in the contemporary era. Indeed, as one woman leader declared of the current chief: "Why should we listen to him? We even make more money than him."

Solidarity among women is being undermined by class differentiation, creating different socialization experiences, life chances, and competing loyalties above and beyond that of sex loyalty. The colonial and mission establishment fostered the growth of a dominant sex-role ideology that stresses domestic training (such as cooking and sewing) at the expense of agricultural production. These ideas permeated the very limited programs for women as well as the curriculum in secondary school for girls. Contemporary wealthy women were exposed to lengthier education and government domestic training programs to a

greater extent than most women, which differentiates them from women on value preferences.[16] Perhaps more importantly, the marked class bias in the distribution of government services strengthens wealthy women's political identification with their households, the unit in which they are subsumed in the allocation of government services.[17] In a zero-sum situation, where the extension of benefits for one group occurs at the expense of another, wealthy women have a material incentive to politically identify with households, and they are unlikely to advocate the redistribution of economic resources unless their household access is secure and additional resources are made available for others. Thus, in the contemporary period, household status is beginning to exert prior claims on women's loyalty, particularly for those households with access to political goods. The political structure reinforces this, distributing benefits on a household, clan, or geographic basis, to which women weakly compete as a cross-cutting pressure group.

Household identifications are encouraged by the content of government programs, which stress women's domestic role, a value incentive that supplements the material incentives toward household identifications. During the late colonial era, chiefs and community development staff sought a more broadly based developmental orientation that included women. Programs in the contemporary era, however, are characterized by a more specialized focus on women, limited to home economics and sewing. This narrow orientation is coupled with an ostensibly sex-neutral distribution of agricultural services--one, however, with discriminatory effect, particularly on female headed households.[18] This obscures equitably distributed agricultural services as a women's issue, despite women's extensive involvement in agriculture.

The convergence of these trends has tended to make any formalization of

the small-scale women's groups based on narrowly defined interests, those that relate to the content of government program precedents. The dispersed political arena also means formalization occurs on a temporary, sporadic basis, when women leaders attempt to maneuver politically during electoral campaigns, claiming representation of the numerous informal groups.

Leadership Amidst Dispersed Contenders

Small-scale, informal women's groups exist for purposes of saving cash and exchanging labor. In a sample of more than two hundred households, over 90% of the women belonged to one or more groups of these types.[19] Groups are formalized to a limited degree, with several leaders, and, for some groups, consciously adopted names.

Most groups recruit members on a neighborhood basis; others, on common church membership. In agricultural groups, members charge each other a small fee, while contract for higher fees from nonmembers. The cash saved is divided at the year's end among approximately six to ten members. Each group, at minimum, has a leader and a treasurer. Wealthier women continue to avoid joining these groups, though they may hire women's groups because their work is considered to be superior to that of day laborers. Hiring groups, however, means added obligations, as contractors must feed the group members during the workday.

Mutual aid groups distribute resources during funeral or bridewealth transactions, requiring extensive food for feeding visitors. Usually, cash or food is collected when needed. Some wealthier educated women participate in mutual aid groups, making their literacy skills and mobility available to members. In these groups, members contribute fixed, monthly donations that are recorded and retained in a distant district capital bank and allocated upon crisis. There is a certain reluctance associated with assuming leadership because of the

time involved, a contrast to the competion in Umoja.

An even greater formalization of groups occurs during electoral campaigns when wealthier women assume leadership and visit candidates. In a delegation, they request help for women and a remembrance of what women do, but more specifically, for donations, women's centers and nurseries. Such centers in the past were associated with the sewing and home economics programs. Women delegates in a nearby sublocation pressed for and succeeded in obtaining such a center in a multi-purpose cooperative, funded by a Dutch grant and staffed by a Home Economics Assistant from the Ministry of Agriculture.[20]

Women leaders exude clout, based on their own personal resources and those of their households. Their husbands have prestige, resulting from work, wealth, and position; husbands either reside in the area or work elsewhere in government or salaried positions, (jobs quite unlike those of most husbands working elsewhere, who are predominantly cooks, domestic servants, and watchmen in Nairobi). More importantly though, these women have their own economic and personal resources which evoke influence. Many are teachers with regular salaries, or enterprising traders and managers of sophisticated farm operations on relatively large pieces of land for the area. They are highly educated relative to the other women, as well as to remaining male residents. Among wealthy households, both husbands and wives tend to work together in strengthening households, a unit of accumulation and investment. Such work maintains the household position in the community hierarchy, and women's political activity helps to consolidate that position. An assertive personality continues to be important in leadership skills, yet the overall importance of education and wealth for exercising any political influence-for men or women-surpasses that of personality characteristics. To speak with confidence to politicians and administrators from outside the sub-

location or location requires known and recognized resources, especially if one is a woman.

The same wealthy women serve on school boards and are appointed "Representatives of Women," on various development committees set up at different levels of the hierarchy as well as county councils. No women sit on the agricultural committee. The degree to which one female is representative of an increasingly diverse group of women is subject to serious question. Created after independence, the development committee in Shikulu is relatively powerless; few residents knew such an institution existed, much less knew who served on it or what issues it addressed (including some of its members). The Woman Representative tended to restrict her comments to those of domestic training, child nurseries, and better care of homes and husbands, an image promoted by government and mission programs of the past and apparently absorbed as a proper one for women. Indeed, these narrowly expressed, special women's issues are not seen as having high priority among some men and women in the community. In the meantime, livelihood concerns and agricultural inequities go unexpressed in the political arena, despite a female organizational base allowing for such expression.

Leaders become bridges to the new set of power contenders in the dispersed political arena. Women intermediaries, as brokers, bridge the relatively informal groups with outside officials and candidates, even when they are not always group members. This raises questions about whether patron-client relations may not be developing among women in Idakho. Exchanging leadership characteristics in return for the diffuse support granted to leaders constitutes the nature of interaction. Such support augments elite efforts to consolidate household position. But more importantly, the issues articulated do not threaten wealthy household access to the spoils of government, nor do they affect the economic status of lower-income

households. The diffuse support allows leaders to push for projects that reflect well on their household, but relate little to women's livelihood concerns; examples include a fence and visitor's house for the church. Brokers, who "bridge the distance between persons so far removed from each other that they could not interact effectively otherwise. . .can alter the meaning of issues and goals."[21] Contemporary women leaders guide the expression and articulation of women's issues in ways that support their ideology and class position.

The commercialization of agriculture and women's increased access to money has, ironically, provided a basis by which women transformed Umoja on their own terms, and at the same time undermined solidarity. With money, no longer are women as dependent on each other as they once were, a mutual dependence with enormous prospects for political productivity. The growing dependency of wives on husbands does not express women's interests in political form--either as a sex group or within households--given the still existing sex-separate communication patterns. Now, however, women are dependent on wealthier women who have the clout, education, and contacts necessary to transmit women's issues to politicians and administrators with similar qualifications. Indeed, many of these women disdain participation in the communal labor groups, and as such are not participating members or officers concerned with more mundane activities in between campaigns. Yet they capture such networks in the political process. At the same time, informal leaders do not have the education, wealth, information about administrative technicalities and connections increasingly seen as necessary to influence politicians and administrators. Women with less prestige are somewhat vulnerable in their interaction with candidates and administrators, especially those from outside the area. In a community setting, leaders with characteristics like those of Umoja leaders can maneuver and influence; beyond that level, new skills and resources are necessary. And disproportionately few women have those skills,

given the unevenness of educational opportunities and the economic disparities between the sexes. Therefore, beyond the community level, the wealthy women leaders may be increasingly less representative of women than were women leaders in the past.

Wealthier women are the sporadic political formalizers, and the terms of which they integrate women into politics are less congruent with women's activities than was true in past terms. Their terms reflect a dominant ideology diffused by the content of government domestic programs, not comprehensive enough to meet women's material and livelihood needs. Moreover, questions must be raised about whose interests are served when wealthier women leaders dominate women's politics in class-based political systems. Formalization as now practiced does not recognize the real diversity among women, widened substantially since Umoja. Perhaps no longer can one group or one set of leaders represent all women, or pose one women's issue as reflective of the needs of all.

Conclusion

Two women's organizations, emerging in two very different settings with contrasting leaders, were compared for their effectiveness in meeting organizational goals. Both varied as well in the degree to which they were formalized and in the formalization process. As is recorded below, each, however, has certain possibilities and shortcomings for meeting women's needs.

Umoja, a broadly based women's organization, represented virtually all women in the sublocation, save the elite. It addressed a variety of issues, congruent with women's domestic, livelihood and economic pursuits. Organizational structure was built primarily on locally derived and understood roles. It represented women along institutionalized regularized lines in community politics at a time when few power contenders could compete with the chief. As such, women were

incorporated into the mainstream of politics and strategically positioned within that mainstream. Nevertheless, incorporation occurred at some cost to the organization, as it was heavily dependent on the chief and his scope of authority. Once out of favor with the chief and in a setting of marginalized community politics, the organization became less meaningful. More importantly, compromises were made with treasuries and activities that later alienated members. With no financial benefits from participation, members were increasingly disenchanted with the prospects of continuing to contribute labor. The size of the organization itself, covering a geographically dispersed sublocation and approximately 2,000 households, contributed to the accountability tensions between leaders and members as well. Moreover, the very congruence of Umoja with local patterns meant leaders avoided raising questions about women's customary work and behavior, as evidencedby elder's judgments.

Contemporary groups are linked to a wider array of power contenders by leaders who irregularly participate (if at all) in informal groups. Narrowly-based issues, defined by leaders, are only partially congruent with women's activities. The structural characteristics of women's political integration are based on and absorbed from the larger class-based politics of Kenya, where wealth and education are prime influence criteria. Representing women takes place in a less regular, more dispersed political arena, amidst numerous contenders. The formalization process occurs through wealthy women, on value terms less comprehensive than those of Umoja.

The comparison suggests that certain political contexts are conducive to the incorporation of women's interests. Unstable, yet structurally centralized community politics are amenable to absorbing women's demands and granting concessions. To meet these conditions, community politics, however, must be a

significant arena for distributing resources and allocating values--not true of the empty shell of contemporary community politics in Kenya. Authoritarian leaders, if receptive and predisposed to integrating a new group, give freer reign to organizational transformation. Once restabilized or restructured in different terms, women may figure into the political equation in less significant ways. Formalization at the level of and on the terms of a community, enhance prospects for success in meeting women's needs. Building on an already strong base of women's resources may result in a lessening of disparities between the sexes. However, building on the base of widespread disparities may simply reinforce differences.

The importance of a catalyst to organizations, such as the chief and sub-chief for Umoja, cannot be overemphasized. It might be argued that the authorities pre-empted organizational initiation and thus interfered with women's consciousness. Nevertheless, lacking precedent for women's political integration, an organization like Umoja would not have begun, even though theoretic conditions existed for its emergence.

Dispersed politics, interlaced with county, parliamentary, and administrative politics, on the other hand, provide more access points. In this context, however, alliance politics may be necessary. Alliance politics necessarily requires articulation of broadly defined issues, potentially appealing to a variety of contenders and to a variety of group members. If a women's group pressures for a single, special issue separate from the mainstream, their issues may remain isolated with limited or no response. Ironically, if integrated into other groups before "special" interests are internalized as a widespread value and before sex communication in politics is integrated, issues go unarticulated. Alternatively, a number of women's groups offersbetter prospects for representing

what is increasingly true in this community and others--the diversity among women and women's interests. At the same time, a wider array of issues will be articulated, with better prospects for alliance building and meeting women's needs. As popular mobilization spreads political activism, skill among leaders, and the productive use of resources to increase member resources, the motor for fundamental change can eventually emerge.

FOOTNOTES

[1]On the division of labor, see the classic study by Ester Boserup, WOMAN'S ROLE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (New York: St. Martins, 1970), Marjorie Mbilinyi, 'The 'New Woman' & Traditional Norms in Tanzania," JOURNAL OF MODERN AFRICAN STUDIES 10, 1, 1972, and Achola Pala, "African Women in Rural Development: Research Trends & Priorities," Overseas Liaison Committee, American Council on Education, Washington, D. C., No. 12, 1976. On the division of income in households, see the introduction and selections in Nancy Hafkin & Edna Bay, eds., AFRICAN WOMEN IN CHANGING PERSPECTIVE, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), Claire Robertson, 'Women & Change in Marketing Conditions in the Accra Area," RURAL AFRICANA 29, 1976, and Boserup. On male preference, see Kathleen A. Staudt, 'Women Farmers & Inequities in Agricultural Services," RURAL AFRICANA 29, 1976.

[2]Jamene Okonjo, 'The Dual-Sex Political System in Operation: Igbo Women & Community Politics in Midwestern Nigeria," in Hafkin & Bay, op. cit., Nancy Leis, 'Women in Groups: Ijaw Women's Associations," in Michele Rosaldo & Louise Lamphere, eds., WOMAN, CULTURE & SOCIETY, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), Annie Lebeuf, 'The Role of Women in the Political Organization of African Societies," in WOMEN OF TROPICAL AFRICA, Denise Paulme, ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), Phyllis Kaberry, WOMEN OF THE GRASSFIELDS, (London: H.M.S.O., 1952), Mary Holding, 'Women's Institutions & the African Church," INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF MISSIONS 31, July, 1942, and Judith Van Allen, "Sitting on a Man: Colonialism & the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women," CANADIAN JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES 6, 2, 1972.

[3]Hans D. Seibel & Andreas Massing, TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATIONS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (New York: Praeger, 1974), Richard T. Curley, ELDERS, SHADES & WOMEN (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), Patricia Stamp, "Perceptions of Change & Economic Strategy Among Kikuyu Women in Mitero, Kenya," RURAL AFRICANA 29, 1976, Eleanor Wachtel, "A Farm of One's Own," RURAL AFRICANA 29, 1976, Martha Mueller, 'Women & Men, Power & Powerlessness in Lesotho," SIGNS, 3, 1, Autumn, 1977, Barbara Lewis, 'The Limitations of Group Activity Among Entrepreneurs: The Market Women in Abidjan, Ivory Coast," in Hafkin & Bay, op. cit.

[4]Andrew S. McFarland, POWER & LEADERSHIP IN PLURALIST SYSTEMS, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 174, Alvin W. Gouldner, STUDIES IN LEADERSHIP: LEADERSHIP & DEMOCRATIC ACTION (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), pp. 23ff, and Daniel Katz, "Patterns of Leadership," in Jeanne Knutson, HANDBOOK OF POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1973).

[5]Formalization is seen here as a matter of degree, referring to such characteristics as increased size, scale, and complexity, as well as to the existence of a name and a clearly defined membership. Formalization does not necessarily imply registration with the government.

[6]Documents with scattered reference to women's barazas and special government programs targeting women as a clientele include post-war ANNUAL REPORTS (known initially as North Kavirondo, subsequently as North Nyanza, and currently as Kakamega), Western Province ANNUAL REPORTS, Ikolomani Division Handing-Over Report (1955) and Miscellaneous File (1958-59), and the printed Kenya Colony & Protectorate ANNUAL REPORTS from 1948-1961. I am grateful to the Kenya National Archives for making this evidence available to me. The "woman subchief" also had some old and tattered documentation of Umoja meetings which she made available to me after a number of meetings. I am also grateful to the U.S. Office of Education Title VI Foreign Language Fellowship Fund and the African Studies Program of the University of Wisconsin for financial and travel funds that supported this research, as well as to the Andala family who welcomed me as an additional member during my stay in Shikulu sublocation. The sublocation is the smallest administrative unit in Kenya, with approximately 1500-2000 households.

[7]His salary was estimated to be about five times that of teachers.

[8]The allegations were probably not made during his time in office, as people remark that they "fear complaining" while someone is currently in power. It is difficult to document the accuracies of these allegations; perhaps some exaggeration was present in peoples' minds.

[9]On Baluyia women's role in agricultural production, see Gunter Wagner, THE BANTU OF NORTH KAVIRONDO (London: Oxford, 1949), I, p. 41, Walter Sangree, AGE, PRAYER & POLITICS IN TIRIKI KENYA (London: Oxford, 1966), p. xxxvi, Staudt, op. cit., and Government of Kenya, Ministry of Economic Planning & Development, "A Report on Economic Studies of Farming in Nyanza Province: 1963, "Farm Economic Report No. 26, (Nairobi: Government Printer, February, 1969).
On participation in production and control over production as indicators of women's status, see "Female Status in the Public Domain," Peggy Sanday, in Rosaldo & Lamphere, op. cit. On participation in public labor as a source of women's status, see Karen Sacks "Engels Revisited: Women, the Organization of Production, and Private Property," also in Rosaldo & Lamphere.

[10]According to Wagner, II, thirty per cent of the men worked for wage employment outside the district in 1937, p. 94. The 1945 district ANNUAL REPORT states that the area was the largest labor exporter in Kenya. An attachment to the 1955 to the district ANNUAL REPORT reports that eighty per cent of the "able-bodied" men worked outside the district, probably an exaggeration. The latest government census in 1969 shows women numerically dominant in the district, location, and sublocation; from this and the historical information, an inference is drawn about female numerical dominance in the late colonial period.

[11]For an analysis of the costs and benefits of compulsion in Umoja, see Kathleen A. Staudt, "The Umoja Federation: Women's Cooptation into a Local Power Structure," WESTERN POLITICAL QUARTERLY, June, 1980. Even the secretary-treasurer roles adapted, in part, to local conditions. In some clans, the two roles were initially joined, separated only after suspicions about financial mismanagement.

[12]For a discussion of how the status of an "in-marrying stranger" explains the low proportion of women exercising leadership positions in rural China compared to men, see Norma Diamond, "Collectivization, Kinship & the Status of Women in Rural China," BULLENTIN OF CONCERNED ASIAN SCHOLARS, January-March, 1975.
Maendeleo centers refer to Maendeleo ya Wanawake (Swahili for Progress of Women), an organization initially created within the Department of Community Development, which became an independent voluntary organization around independence. At clubs, women learn sewing, embroidery, table decorations, handicraft skills, and occasionally, vegetable gardening. For an analysis of Maendeleo leadership at the national level, see Audrey Wipper, "Equal Rights for Women in Kenya?" JOURNAL OF MODERN AFRICAN STUDIES 9, 3 (1971) and "The Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Movement: Some Paradoxes and Contradictions," THE AFRICAN STUDIES REVIEW, XVIII, 3, December, 1975.

[13]An analysis of the Bunyore Women's Society can be found in Kathleen A. Staudt, "Sex, Ethnic, and Class Consciousness in Western Kenya," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting, African Studies Association, Baltimore, Maryland, November 1-4, 1978.

[14]Staudt, "The Umoja Federation. . ." op. cit.

[15]On increased administrative power, see selections in Goran Hyden, Robert Jackson, and John Okumu, DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION: THE KENYAN EXPERIENCE (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1970) and Henry Bienen, KENYA: THE POLITICS OF PARTICIPATION & CONTROL, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974).

[16]On the diffusion of this dominant sex-role ideology in former British colonial Africa, see Kathleen A. Staudt, "'Victorian Womanhood' in British Colonial Africa: The Role of Social Service Programs," Paper presented to the Conference on the History of Women, St. Paul, October 21-23, 1977. On how this ideology affects women's consciousness in western Kenya, see Staudt, "Sex, Ethnic. . ." op. cit. A club reflecting this ideology attracted a tenth of non-elite women in a large sample of households interviewed, but over half of elite women in a smaller sample.

[17]On class and sex bias in the delivery of agricultural services, see Staudt, ibid. On class bias generally, see Colin Leys, UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN KENYA: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF NEO-COLONIALISM (London: Heinemann, 1975) and Lionel Cliffe, "Underdevelopment or Socialism? A Comparative Analysis of Kenya & Tanzania," in Richard Harris, ed., THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AFRICA (New York: John Wiley, 1975). On preference to the wealthy in the delivery of agricultural services, see David Leonard, REACHING THE PEASANT FARMER: ORGANIZATION THEORY & PRACTICE IN KENYA (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), Chapter 9, and Joseph Ascroft, Fred Chege, Joseph Kariuki, Niels Roling, and George Ruigu, "Does Extension Create Poverty in Kenya?" EAST AFRICAN JOURNAL, March, 1972.

[18]Even Community development is associated with sewing clubs in the contemporary period. For a limited, irregular time, women sewing teachers were given stipends by local and county councils. For an analysis of discriminatory effect on female household heads, see Staudt, "Women Farmers. . ." op. cit. and "Agricultural Productivity Gaps: A Case Study of Male Preference in Government Policy Implementation," DEVELOPMENT & CHANGE, July, 1978.

[19]Staudt, "Women Farmers. . ." op. cit.

[20]An analysis of this is found in Kathleen Staudt, "Administrative Resources, Political Patrons & Redressing Sex Inequities: A Case from Western Kenya," JOURNAL OF DEVELOPING AREAS, September, 1978. During electoral campaigns, candidates give women matches and packets of sugar, and some promise to reduce market fees or provide uniforms for supporters.

[21]Carl H. Lande, "Introduction: The Dyadic Basis of Clientelism," in Steffen Schmidt, Laura Guasti, Carl Lande and James Scott, eds., FRIENDS, FOLLOWERS AND FACTIONS (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. xxxv.