

**DISCUSSION PAPER ON GENDER RELATED DISCRIMINATION AND ITS
MANIFESTATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY: SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNIST
PARTY PERSPECTIVE**

JOYCE MOLOI-MOROPA

ABSTRACT

The paper is premised on the notion that locates the sovereignty of a society at equal level with the freedom of the women. The position of the paper is that the analysis of liberty of humanity depends on the extent to which gender relations are non-repressive and liberating to both men and women. We hold a view that it is not probable to construct socialism and democracy devoid of, in that course of action, defeating the demon of gender oppression and transforming gender relations. This perspective is based on the realities confirming the persistence of gender oppression even in socialist structures and states. Comprising over 50 percent of the world's population, women continue to endure sadistic treatment by their counterparts even after their societies have attained a democratic order.

INTRODUCTION

The strategic objectives of the South African National Democratic Revolution (SANDR) is to create a non-sexist, non-racial, united and democratic society. However, racism and gender oppression continue to manifest itself in the form of domestic violence, sexual abuses, gender inequalities and patriarchal practices. In this paper I aim at making a input into the worldwide analysis of the collective challenges faced by the women of the world, who makes up the majority of the world's population despite existing progressive legislation in many countries. Although I am serving in the leadership of both the African National Congress (ANC) and SACP, the perspective of this paper is influenced by the analysis of the SACP, of which I have just being elected to its National Deputy Chairperson.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Much as the struggle for women's emancipation (as distinct from the struggle for transformation of gender relations) has always been a component of the national liberation struggle and our perspectives on socialism. It is a truism that it was not until the 1980s that the national liberation movement and the SACP begun to

determinedly have as a facet gender equality into our programmes and perspectives. However until then, the major debates and strategic imperative of the SACP and the entirety of the congress movement principally revolved around the relationship between the national and class struggles in the National Democratic Revolution(NDR).

The challenge for the Party and the left is to ensure that the gains made in the democratic struggles, and in the structures of government, do not only benefit the elite women but empower working class and poor women in rural and urban areas. The seeds of national reconstruction and development should liberate the lives of working class women. Which seeds eventually become rooted and nurtured depends on strategy and struggle based on the current understanding of the interconnection between oppressive gender social relations and women's oppression.

Such strategy and struggle must go along with the appropriate organisational forms to carry out the objectives. Without this, neither the emancipation of women nor the transformation of society to a non gender-oppressive socialist formation will be realisable. When we ask why some socialist states have failed, we must include the extent to which the lack of gender transformation played a dampen factor on the democratization of state and on our route to a socialist order within society.

GENDER STRUGGLES AND SACP'S SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION

As the SACP we support the conception that views the continued oppression and exploitation of women, through sexism and gender oppression, as recipes to undermine and distort the construction of socialism. Ending abuse of women and eradicating all forms of oppression of women are part of building democracy and egalitarianism. If we pay no attention to gender relations in the socialist revolutionary progression, the result will be a reversal of the democratic gains these societies have earned.

The SACP's contribution is to use the current struggle to guarantee that the interests of black working class women are in the fore front of consolidating and deepening the fight against patriarchy. The SACP has called on all women

communist cadres to take the lead in pursuit of the struggle to roll back the frontiers of this pervasive global challenge of gender-based discrimination within the broader context of our strategic agenda.

While pursuing the gender equality struggle, at the theoretical and practical levels, the SACP's political and ideological outlook is to remain unadulterated:

- Through our red forums that are currently underway, we are placing the struggle for gender equality of the working class women at the fore and ensure that such a struggle is firmly entrenched;
- Through organising women around their day to day life activities such as church goers, domestic workers, as casualised labour, as unemployed and other formations pursuing common progressive agenda; and
- Through active engagement with the emerging perspectives, programmes and priorities within the new Ministry and other organizations that are genuine to the emancipation of women of South Africa by affirming the SACP's Gender and Social Transformation Commission.

The SACP is pursuing this gender struggle bearing in mind of the fact of the negative impact that the current global financial crisis has on the black working classes and poor women of the world. The Party therefore commits its women communist cadres to spare no effort in taking on these forces that react negatively against the emancipation of black working class women who constitute an important motive force of our NDR.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO HEIGHTEN AND ADVANCE THE STRUGGLE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Although South African government has excellent intentions when it comes to addressing gender inequalities, as evidenced by introducing progressive legislative frameworks and the establishment of structures. At the same time it is also evident that such measures and instruments have not fully translated in the shifting of behavior of

society in this area of work.

The South African government, four years after first non-racial democratic elections, has responded promptly in the institutionalization of instruments to support survivors of gender-based violence as an imperative of government policy. The establishment of the Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP) under the National Crime Prevention Strategy to promote a victim-centered approach to crime prevention, is indicative of the commitment of our democratic state to mitigate the impact of the 'scourge'.

The 09th of August has been declared a public holiday and is called the woman's day in commemoration of the heroism displayed by 2000 women, when marching to the Union Building, Pretoria in 1953 to protest and register their grievances against the repressive laws of the apartheid regime during the bitter struggle for our national liberation.

The government has also declared August month a woman's month in order to heighten the fight against gender- based violence and general gender oppressive tendencies in society.

Participation of women in high political office and other top structures of public life should serve to give women a stronger voice and a unique opportunity to advance their cause. The policy on gender parity that the ruling party is rigorously implementing and the configuration of the National Executive, Cabinet to devote resources to tackle this demon of gender discrimination, will lead to the radicalization of the struggle for gender equality.