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NAMIBIAN WOMEN IN THE STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL  
LIBERATION, INDEPENDENCE AND RECONSTRUCTION

by

The SWAPO Women's Council

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A Paper prepared for UNESCO

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 20th Century has witnessed tremendous leaps and bounds in science and technology, introducing machines with vast ranges of capacities in weightless space, the depth of oceans, and in protecting and prolonging human life. The scientific revolution has also taken great strides towards simplifying the process of producing materials essential for human existence.

But in spite of these great scientific and technological achievements humanity cries out for the solution of a hundred and one social problems that have caused pain, suffering and unnecessary death. Hunger and disease still haunt millions. Thousands die every year, succumbing to the excruciating pain of hunger and malnutrition. Oppression and denial of the right to self-determination claims thousands more lives every year in lives of men, women and children. Apartheid policies have put vast populations into a modern and more vicious form of slavery. One of the still oppressed, exploited and brutalized groups in the middle of all this overwhelming scientific and technological progress is that of women. Women in capitalist, feudal and colonial countries still suffer inequality, oppression and exploitation. This oppression and exploitation not only brings suffering to the women, but it also detracts from their full and vigorous contribution to the growth of science, technology and culture, and to the development of social, political and economic measures for the elimination of all forms of oppression war and hunger.

It has to be remembered that women hold up one half of the sky, and as such if their contribution is less than what it should be because of social and political impediments their half of the sky will come down crashing on the world, causing even greater suffering for all. In the free countries, that is, socialist countries, women are taking leading roles in various social and productive spheres of life. They are a vigorous part of the workforce, not by sufferance from men but as both a right and a duty. The same cannot be said of women in capitalist countries and in developing countries. Here women are still subjected to age-old discrimination on grounds of sex and are victims of oppressive feudal practices. The subjugation of women is a daily reality in many parts of the world today. Like other social phenomena, its roots must necessarily be found in the mode of production, and more specifically in the relations of production. The social relations which carry the inequality and the institutions within which these relations are expressed are products of the particular level of development in a given society. As long as exploitation exists in a society, that is, as long as class society exists, inequality, including inequality of women, will persist. Conversely, women's emancipation and ability to participate fully in all aspects of material and spiritual life can only be achieved through class struggle.

Namibia is an under-developing country still under South African colonial rule. Namibian women are part of the oppressed Namibian nation. But under the present occupation regime they suffer three levels of injustice: first, as part of the oppressed nation; second, from the discrimination against them as women (in employment and delivery of services as sanctioned by the colonial state machinery); and thirdly, from oppressive feudal practices which are still endemic in a large section of Namibian men. This is not specific to Namibia alone. The social and economic relations of the colonial and apartheid state system imposed on the Namibian society which was already well on the road to a centralized feudal state only intensified the oppression. Customs and values die hard. Many of the then ingrained feudal values and customs are still prevalent among Namibians. It is against some

of these oppressive and exploitative feudal values and customs that the present struggle for liberation is aimed at. Only within a socialist restructuring of society can women be liberated from the different forms of oppression and exploitation. In order to achieve equality in practice, women will have to become active participants in the political, economic and administrative life of the society. Namibian women have been and are a vital part of the struggle for national and social liberation. The history of the struggle offers ample evidence of that. The women will also play an indispensable part in the struggle for reconstruction and development after independence.

## II. NAMIBIAN WOMEN PRIOR TO THE EMERGENCE OF THE ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLE

There are definite stages in the evolution of the Namibian woman's position in society in the pre-colonial period. A grasp of this evolution makes easier our comprehension of the present and future struggles by the Namibian women for equality and against exploitation.

### a) The Semi-Feudal Period

Namibia, before European encroachment is best described as semi-feudal. There was a co-existence of feudal relations of production and typically communal relations of production. Feudal relations of production were dominant in the Jonker Afrikaaner centralizing state which came into existence after 1842 and which, with its capital at Windhoek, covered most of central Namibia. A burgeoning aristocracy was beginning to live off surpluses produced by the people and on taxes collected from the people.

Communal relations of production held sway in small pockets of the country. Here the status of the Namibian woman was that of an equal contributor towards the family and community well-being. Specific to communal relations of production in general were two aspects. First, division of labour was based on sex, taking account account of the child-bearing and rearing roles of the woman and not the nature of economic power the man or the woman would wield as a result of such division of labour. Second, the material contribution by either the man or the woman was necessarily limited by the fact that they and their means of labour as productive forces were still undeveloped.

The woman's tasks tended to confine her to the house and its vicinity. But the value attached to her labour was the same as that attached to the man's labour. With the further division of labour, separating distinctly handicrafts from agriculture and mental

from manual work, and the production of surplus, a form of tribal aristocracy began to emerge based on men's freedom of movement afforded by the nature of their tasks. They thus began to subject women and other men to an inferior status. This was communal society at the threshold of feudalism. By the mid 1800's semi-feudal structures had covered the greater part of Namibia. Some have observed that by this time it was not only the area covered by the Jonker Afrikaaner state which included the Hereros and Namas but also the whole area in which the Ovambo lived which "was organised politically in a feudalist manner with power and responsibility rising up from the Kraal headman through the sub-chiefs of the local wards to the tribal chief at the top of the pyramid".<sup>1</sup> The chief could levy taxes from his people.<sup>2</sup> In the Orlam-Nama semi-feudal regime the feudal nobility came from the large herd owners, many of which herds they extorted from the ordinary people. It was a typically predatory economy, relying on patronage.

From that time on, the woman had lost her original status as an equal contributor and consumer of the social wealth. In this predominantly feudal part of Namibia, the status of the woman grew worse as a result of the changed production relations. Like in all other such societies, the Namibian woman became more and more an adjunct to the man, performing the bulk of the tasks at home and in the fields, and enjoying less of the benefits of her products which came to be controlled by the man. We see, for example, that the woman among the Herero not only had the duty to erect the roomy house with its domed roof,<sup>3</sup> she also milked the cows, a major productive activity since milk was an important part of the diet. But her status remained inferior to that of her husband. This point is proved further in the custom common among the Ovambos when a young woman was handed over to her husband to go and set up their own home. Part of the handing over ceremony was a statement by the woman's male next of kin which despite its tongue-in-cheek approach, intimated rather indirectly that she had less rights than the man!<sup>4</sup>



The woman's tasks were gradually associated with an inferior status regardless of their social importance. She prepared all the food and drink- she carried water, firewood and other heavy household utensils over long distances every day and she not only bore the children, she was also directly responsible for their well-being.<sup>5</sup> But despite these important contributions to the family and to society, the value of such contributions was down-played in direct relationship to the social differentiation taking place in the struggle for the control and use of the surpluses. In consequence, the social and economic status of man was correspondingly raised resulting in the further suppression of women.

b) Forced Transition

In Namibia, the major stimulus for the commencement of the break up of the communal and semi-feudal production relations (a process which is still in progress) came from the imposition of a colonial socio-cultural, political and economic order. The colonial order required the existence of different relations of production. The semi-feudal relations in Namibia at this stage were interlaced with subsisting tribal allegiances. But more and more, the value attached to a woman under feudalism, that is commodity value, was slowly finding greater expression. In broad terms across the whole society, the woman's status clearly was that of a semi-serf. But already there was in the lives of some women an underlying ferment to break out of the stifling confinement. The war situation then, as now, played a consciousness raising role. Men and women played important roles in trying to keep German colonialists from seizing Namibia. Those men and women "who could not bear weapons helped in the preparations (for war) in every way they could."<sup>6</sup> "Women did not just sit down but they were part and parcel of the resistance. They were taken as prisoners of war to other German colonies like Cameroun and Togo. This spirit continued to live on."<sup>7</sup>

Besides the conscientizing effect of the war, the expanding mercantile-cum-colonial community, including the missionary community, also accelerated the re-definition of Namibian women's roles in their changing society. The imposition of forced labour (a forerunner to today's contract labour system) on Namibian men necessarily changed the nature of productive labour for women. While the men were gone to work on white farms and in white households women had to take on tasks ordinarily performed by men in the home. They took on the full burden of looking after the children and any dependants. This redefinition of productive labour for women forced them to break out of the traditionally defined areas of work for women. Many began to be employed in white men's houses, mission stations, etc., as maids and other types of exploited labour. This was particularly so in the southern and central parts of Namibia where colonial settlers directly dispossessed Namibians of their land.

These new experiences were crucibles for new ideas, bringing the issue of feudal oppression and exploitation and national oppression to the fore. Henceforth it would be impossible to erase these experiences and knowledge from the minds of the women. As history, these experiences became useful to subsequent generations of Namibian women analysing their own position in the continuing class struggle and social transformation. Colonial incursion had served two contradictory purposes: it created a colonial nemesis the purpose of which was national oppression and exploitation, but which also became a vehicle for raising social and class consciousness among the oppressed. This is as it should, true, to the science of dialectics !

Once the contradiction was created by colonial intervention, it was inevitable that the roused anti-colonial sentiment should grow among all Namibians. Namibian women found themselves drawn more and more into direct confrontation with the authorities. The nature of the confrontation changed qualitatively as the women developed greater consciousness.

### III. NAMIBIAN WOMEN IN THE PROTEST MOVEMENT

The initial resistance by the people of Namibia against German colonial incursion was brutally put down, superior arms being the decisive factor. However, metaphorically, the colonialists had won a battle and not the war.

#### a) The Anti-Colonial Sentiment Gathers Momentum

The people turned to passive resistance, using strikes, mass demonstrations against employers and government agencies, and petitions to international organisations in order to stop mass expulsions of Africans from their land, taxation without representation, the contract labour system, and racial discrimination. Colonial policies had a great impact on changing the social, political and economic roles of Namibian women. Netumbo Nandi, in an interview, says:

"Since colonialism the participation of the men in cultivation has decreased substantially. The African men were rapidly creamed off from the rural areas to work as cheap contract labourers in the colonialists' mining, fishing and ranching industries. Therefore, under colonialism the Namibian rural women have even harder times than before.

Husbands are not allowed to take their families along to the places of employment. Thus, women must always remain working in the fields as well as looking after children at home and the overall household, while their husbands and the older boys are gone for very long spells - twelve to eighteen months - on their contract in the so-called "white areas". The man's wages are so meagre that the drudgery of rural women's field work is hardly ever alleviated by such incomes.

The South African colonialists, and the Germans before them, made a conscious effort to prevent subsistence

agriculture from evolving into advanced commercial farming. They prevented mechanisation and large scale cultivation that would produce cash crops. The motive was to make sure that the largest number of African men would always be readily available for contract labour in the mines or on their plantations. As a consequence, much of the cultivation in rural Namibia is still done with hoes, and it is the women who do much of the field work, using their hands for tilling, sowing, weeding, harvesting and threshing.<sup>8</sup>

In the urban areas, Africans were denied proper and decent housing. In some cases they were forcibly removed from certain townships to make way for occupation by whites.<sup>9</sup>

It was because of these and numerous other acts of oppression and brutality that the protest movement developed in Namibia. The lessons of the struggle and the contradictions within it threw forth a leadership of men and women who were able to articulate the yearnings and demands of the people. The Namibian woman was coming into her own, asserting her rights not only to be in a free country but also to be free herself from feudal oppression by men.

The protest movement was the first to offer Namibian women a concrete platform for the new women's leadership. Women showed their grasp of the problems facing the people, as well as a capacity for leadership. They grasped particularly the fact that

"In colonial society women carry a double burden of disabilities. First, as in most forms of society known in history, they suffer exploitation on grounds of sex. Second, under colonial capitalism they are subject to discrimination by race and by class. The two kinds of oppression interact and re-enforce each other.<sup>10</sup>"

Namibian women began to understand, therefore, that the defeat of colonialism was a pre-condition for the removal of this "double burden of disabilities."

The protest movement from the turn of the century into the sixties owed much of its leadership to women. Women initiated militant campaigns on their own.

"After the genocide of their people by the German army in 1904-5, Herero women resolved not to bear children while German rule lasted in their homeland. Later, it was Herero women who took the lead once more in refusing - where they could afford it - to abase themselves by becoming 'nannies' for white families. In 1955, women were also prominent in the Herero revolt against the apartheid practising Lutheran Church in Namibia which culminated in the formation of the Oruano, an independent community church. In 1958, it was the women who were responsible for the routing of government puppets from the Windhoek Advisory Board."<sup>11</sup>

The Advisory Board had accepted recommendations by one of its members to apply corporal punishment to women who broke the apartheid regime's pass laws.

Tension between the oppressed and the occupation regime was mounting every day. The defiance of pass laws mostly by women demonstrated the mounting opposition to the colonial regime. A conflict situation was brewing because of the decision by the authorities to move by force the residents of the Old Location in Windhoek to a segregated area for black people only. Since the first petition at the United Nations in 1946 for a free Namibia, and throughout all subsequent ones, South Africa had shown contempt for the Namibian people and the world organisation. Thus in 1959 its colonial administrator in Namibia had gone ahead with preparations for the forcible removal of the residents of the Old Location to an exclusively black area further away from the city

centre just as petitioners were at the UN to inform the world organisation about the injustice and cruelty of the colonial regime against the Namibian people. The evicted residents of the Old Location were later to name their place of banishment "Katutura", meaning in Herero "We have no dwelling place of our own".

At the UN, as soon as they had received the news about the threatened removals to Katutura, the petitioners had protested against these removals.<sup>12</sup>

"By the end of 1959 feeling among the 30,000 residents of the Old Location was running high. A demonstration by women in front of the Administrator's residence was followed by a boycott of location services and facilities... On the night of December 10, armed police entered the location and fired into the crowd. Eleven Namibians were killed and 54 injured.

The blood in the streets of Windhoek that night showed many Namibians not only that protests, petitions, resolutions at the UN were unsuccessful in their object of restoring to the Namibians their stolen country. As it had been for their grandfathers, the contract with the occupying power remained the same: loss of land and freedom for which the only alternative to acceptance was death!"<sup>13</sup>

Namibian women were at the head of the protest, and their determination to fight for what is theirs was demonstrated that night by the patriotic deeds of one of the women victims, Kakulukaze Mungunda, "who heroically burnt down the official car of the racist administrator as a protest against the killing of the innocent Namibians by the racist police on that day..."<sup>14</sup>

Apartheid policies of the occupation regime lay at the root of the forced removals of the residents of the Old Location. Clearly, the residents of the Old Location understood and opposed the political and economic consequences of being sent to Katutura.

"Katutura was further from the town, and bus fares to work would be high; there would be no freehold ownership, screening would weed out those judged not 'fit and proper'; the municipal regulations promised to be unbearably irksome, above all, the removal was clearly part of the whole apartheid scheme to segregate Africans, control their every movement, shift them from place to place at the whim of the white administration.<sup>15</sup> "

These events brought the final awakening for Namibians, men and women. It was time to take stock of events and to try to understand the future requirements of the struggle. The Windhoek massacre "transformed the perspectives of liberation in Namibia. In the clearest possible terms the occupation regime had shown that it would ruthlessly crush all attempts at peaceful persuasion and popular mobilisation."<sup>16</sup> The regime increased its repression, imprisoning, banning or restricting the emerging leadership of Namibian nationalism.

It is therefore not accidental that the ranks of SWAPO swelled after it was launched on April 19, 1960. A large number among the members were women. SWAPO gave concrete expression to their search for a vehicle by which to turn their disillusionment with the UN, particularly its inability to prevent massacres of peaceful demonstrators, into a new basis for the struggle. That new basis was stated succinctly in the statement by SWAPO's external Headquarters in Dar es Salaam following the International Court of Justice's refusal on July 18, 1966 to deliver a judgement on the Namibian case. On the same day SWAPO condemned the refusal saying, however, that the refusal "would relieve Namibians once

and for all from any illusions which they may have harboured about the United Nations as some kind of saviour in their plight..." "We have no alternative", continued the statement, "but to rise in arms and bring about our liberation".<sup>17</sup> The lines would now be clearly drawn.

b) The Lines are drawn

The Windhoek massacre of December 10, 1959 "crystallized into anti-colonial protest. And women were in the fore-front of mobilizing the people against injustice and oppression".<sup>18</sup> Kakurukaze Mungunda and others who sacrificed their lives for freedom became symbols for a higher form of struggle. December 10, was to become Namibia Women's Day in recognition of the enormous pace-setting contribution by Namibian women towards the liberation and independence of their country. The nature of their contribution was at the same time evidence of the transformed struggle. The period of passive resistance had inexorably come to a close.

When SWAPO was launched as a national united front, women at once took an active role in building the mass character of the Movement. SWAPO's working class origins enabled its cadres to draw "hundreds to their first mass meetings in the middle of 1960. The peasants responded enthusiastically to the two cardinal rallying points of SWAPO's campaign: national unity and self-reliance in the struggle for independence. At every turn SWAPO cadres exposed the oppressive policies of the regime and its tribal lackeys. Since the authorities had failed to provide adequate relief for the prevailing drought, SWAPO bought and distributed grain to those in need."<sup>19</sup> This fact was more than a mobilizing instrument. It was a classroom for the oppressed, particularly those women who were victims of the migrant labour system.



Under migrant labour, women are condemned to raise their children virtually single-handed, with only a little help from elderly or sick relatives. They suffer long, wasting years of loneliness as their husbands appear fleetingly, only to be driven by hardship to depart on contract once more after a few short weeks or months. But on top of their single-parent-hood, women in the reserves, barred from nearly all types of employment, are compelled to provide by their own labour for most of the subsistence needs of themselves, their children and their elderly relatives.<sup>20</sup>

It is against this experience that thousands of women in rural areas became active SWAPO party workers or staunch supporters. This mobilisation later stood the liberation movement in good stead when the liberation struggle required reliable cadres to shelter the People's Liberation Army of Namibia combatants. Moreover, the mobilized women brought back on to the stage demonstrations in a more politically sharpened form to serve the new phase - the armed struggle - specifically as a conscientizing instrument. "We began to see that when SWAPO youth activists held meetings and demonstrations against colonialism, girls were sometimes in the majority.... Colonial jails also began to be filled not only with men but also with women."<sup>21</sup>

IV. THE ROLE OF NAMIBIAN WOMEN IN THE NATIONAL LIBERATION STRUGGLE

SWAPO launched the armed struggle on August 26, 1966, effectively transforming the liberation struggle and placing qualitatively new demands on its cadres both inside and outside Namibia. The new demands were to mobilize the masses, and to plan and prosecute the political and armed struggle. Women are carrying their share of these tasks both inside and outside.

a) Political Mobilization

It has been said that one of the tests for the genuineness of a struggle for national liberation is the degree to which women have been mobilized to take part in the struggle. The degree to which this is so is a measure of both the comprehension of the double nature of women's oppression, and the fact that both forms of oppression must go if there is to be genuine liberation. Since liberation is at once a physical, mental, and spiritual emancipation it cannot be achieved by proxies. All the oppressed must participate at one level or another of the struggle. Those who cannot because of physical or other handicaps must be drawn in at the intellectual and spiritual levels. Political mobilization is one of the fundamentals of a national liberation struggle. It is first the raising of the consciousness of the oppressed about their condition of oppression, and getting the oppressed to take measures to end their oppression.

Apart from the conscientization inherent in the antagonistic relationship between oppressor and oppressed, there is consciousness which must be imparted formally by explaining social development and the characteristic social and class forces at each stage of social development. There is, above all, need for theoretical and ideological knowledge in order to fully grasp the origins of oppression and exploitation and their antidote.

The importance of political mobilization as such is shown by the efforts which SWAPO has made in order to get all Namibians involved in the political and military struggle to liberate their country. This importance is underlined further by the fact that extra effort has been made to reach Namibian women the majority of whom would otherwise be kept away by traditional attitudes of men towards women. The Secretary of SWAPO Women's Council, Pendukeni Kaulinge, observes that "Since 1966 women were at the forefront mobilizing the masses, explaining what SWAPO is and what it fights for. Women like Gertrude Kandanga, Netumbo Nandi, Victoria Namene, Kaagwana Iilende are a few examples of those women who were wholly and totally involved in carrying out SWAPO messages and mobilizing the masses."<sup>22</sup> That is why even under difficult conditions, SWAPO worked hard in late sixties and early seventies to set up a Women's Council inside Namibia. The Council used small meetings, public meetings and demonstrations to organize the women. These meetings provided opportunities for Namibian women to get political education.

"Whoever saw any of these rallies, or even a picture of them, could not help but be impressed by the high percentage of women at such public political gatherings; and women have not been attending such rallies just as mere spectators, but as active participants. They have been delivering militant speeches as well as leading the singing of liberation songs, disseminating messages of revolutionary attack against and criticism of the existing political order in Namibia. These speeches and songs also contain messages of inspiration and undying hope in the future of Namibia."<sup>23</sup>

The confidence which the women have exuded at these meetings even before the watchful and disapproving eye of the enemy, has been a great mobilizing factor. It has to be expected, of course, that every conscious cadre is a double enemy of the colonial and racist regime. If any indication is needed of the key role played by women in mobilizing the

masses one looks at the number of women jailed and/or tortured. In 1972 and 1973 at the height of political work by the Women's Council and the Yough League "the South African colonial jails in Namibia were getting filled with SWAPO activists, including women."<sup>24</sup> The regime resorted even to mass public floggings in an attempt to halt the spreading fire of political consciousness. Women were among 100 SWAPO members and supporters who were "publicly flogged by Bantustan authorities in Ovamboland."<sup>25</sup> Like their male counterparts, "scores of SWAPO women activists" were detained, tortured and imprisoned for long periods. Instead of frightening the women into submitting to the colonial regime, these acts of brutality hardened the women and men in their resolve to free Namibia and liberate all its people.

In 1976 SWAPO meetings organized inside Namibia concentrated specifically on problems facing Namibian women and how to bring more and more of women into the struggle. At these meetings Women's Council members urged full participation in the struggle by women, and by 1977 a complete machinery was in place for conducting seminars. Successful seminars were held, among other places, in Katutura, Rehoboth and Walvis Bay. The seminars also raised the issue of the emancipation of women from both feudal and colonial oppression as well as the broader issue of the liberation of Namibia.

Women's experiences in the forefront of the struggle made them think systematically about the requirements of the struggle. Having resolved that mobilization is one of the key activities, they also resolved that the process had many aspects each of which had to be carried out simultaneously with the other aspects. The women recognized that "there are still some members of the population who cannot see the importance of women and the role... women can play in a society...."<sup>26</sup> Women are also aware of "the potential danger if men and women are not well informed to understand the

problem".<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the SWAPO Women's Council "has a programme to educate the society against the traditional treatment of women as 2nd class citizens, and to destroy the incorrect notions that women's place is in the kitchen".<sup>28</sup> In this context Namibian women correctly refer to men chauvinists as "the new enemy" in their mobilization call: "Let the masses understand SWAPO and fight the new enemy. We must teach people in our camps how to mobilize for self-reliance. We want to teach women politically how to organise themselves."<sup>29</sup> If the struggle against feudal attitudes is not waged simultaneously with the anti-colonial struggle there will be independence without the liberation of the people.

This two-pronged mobilization effort by women received a booster in both the SWAPO Constitution and the SWAPO Political Programme adopted by the Enlarged Meeting of the Central Committee held in Lusaka in August 1976. These identify sexism and other retrograde practices as reactionary, and direct that these practices be combatted. The commitment by SWAPO to this position is reiterated clearly in numerous official statements. In a way, by taking a revolutionary position on the women question, SWAPO was throwing the challenge at Namibian women to prove their worth where all doors are open to them for leadership.

b) Political Leadership

In January 1980, the SWAPO Women's Council held its first Congress in Angola. In a historic declaration the women affirmed implicitly their readiness and determination to give their share of the leadership of the struggle. Describing themselves as heroes of the revolutionary struggle started by their forefathers, the women recognised "the serious political, diplomatic, economic as well as military situation prevailing in southern Africa in general and in Namibia in particular," and reaffirmed their "full commitment to the National Liberation Struggle... including the armed struggle

which remains the most effective method of achieving genuine independence and freedom for Namibia".<sup>30</sup>

In institutional, organisational and political terms the way to women's effective role in leadership had, in a manner of speaking, been opened up by the 1976 Central Committee decision denouncing sexism and other reactionary tendencies. Lest the position be misconstrued, it may be noted that the decision was neither paternalistic nor was it motivated by the altruism of the men who are the majority in the Central Committee. It was a reflection of the reality in the movement: an assertion by the women of their capability and success as mobilizers; and their readiness to assume the risks of war and political activism. In such a situation, says Nangula Petrus, activists of equal worth are entitled to equal participation in deciding how the struggle will be conducted, and otherwise playing a full role in all aspects of the liberation struggle.<sup>31</sup> The Central Committee gave practical recognition of the situation by electing five women to the Central Committee and by giving urgent priority to the training of women for leadership in military, technical and administrative capacities.

Leadership is the capacity to articulate the people's problems, and to translate their yearnings into concrete programmes of action to solve the problems and to bring happiness to the community. Leadership is a capacity for empathy and an ability to find solutions to problems which confront a community. It is a capacity to decide between right and wrong, and to do what leads to justice for all regardless of the difficulties and obstacles to the leader. Namibian women have more than demonstrated these qualities. They are daily giving leadership, inside and outside Namibia, to vast numbers of workers and peasants, teachers and students, and to combatants. They are rising to the highest positions of responsibility based on their ability and initiative.

The war situation has created many test cases. Families have been split leaving the burden of looking after the children largely on the women. This is particularly so inside the country. In the words of Comrade President Sam Nujoma,

"Those inside the country whose husbands have either been arrested, detained, imprisoned for life or killed, have taken over the burden of looking after the family, relying solely on their meagre incomes and resources to bring up their children and look after the elderly and the maimed.<sup>32</sup>

For this leadership the Namibian nation owes much to its women. They are literally holding together the nation against the enemy that seeks to destroy it. Women in the rear bases have similarly shown tremendous courage and leadership. They are mothers to thousands of children orphaned by South Africa's massacres of defenceless Namibian villagers and refugees. The warmth with which they have attended to the needs of each individual child, and how they have tirelessly taught these children to be self-reliant leaders and liberators of tomorrow is the envy of some already long independent African countries.

Their success is largely because they constantly analyse the situation, determining the contradictions and putting forward proposals for solving the problems. That is the essence of leadership.

Above all, the success in leadership by Namibian women has been the direct result of the permanent struggle to understand SWAPO's political and ideological perspective which acts as a beacon along a dangerous road. By exemplary behaviour, Namibian women are inspiring hundreds of the younger generation, and by their work ethic they are transforming the minds and attitudes of thousands of Namibians who come to know that they can rely on their own initiative.

So far we have talked about women's leadership at the local level and yet it is also common knowledge that women have given and are giving brilliant and revolutionary leadership to SWAPO's international desks as representatives and as delegates to various conferences and workshops.

There is no task more difficult than trying to sell an organisation, particularly a liberation movement, to an international community generally pre-occupied with its own priorities. And yet here SWAPO women alongside the men, have put across the case for Namibia's independence effectively. They have employed all available platforms to achieve this goal. They have seized every opportunity to make the case for Namibia's independence. They have convinced donors to support SWAPO's cause and to give material assistance. To be able to do this they have to possess a thorough knowledge of Namibia, its people and the struggle led by SWAPO. The concept and practice of leadership by Namibian women which we have tried to capture in these few pages is summed up best by one of the members of the Women's Council in an address at a Women's Conference when she said:

"Comrades, all of us are leaders of our nation at our levels;

Let us work for the interests of our comrades rather than for our own interests;

Let us solve others' problems;

Let us bring up all the Namibian children and youth in a revolutionary spirit;

Let us behave as mothers of the nation;

Let us defend our organisation SWAPO of Namibia; and

Let us suggest to our leaders.

Instead of destructive criticism, let us practice constructive criticism and self-criticism.<sup>1133</sup>



c) Social and Productive Activity

Social and productive activity in any community is always the best index for determining the nature of class forces at work, their ideological lines, and thus their concept of development. It is also a measure of the commitment the people have to developing their society. The Namibian people have been suppressed and their productive endeavour thwarted by the apartheid occupation regime. In short, their very existence as a people and as a nation is under severe threat.

Faced with the profound question of whether to continue to exist or go under, the Namibian people naturally are determined to continue to exist. Thus, faced with the question of the relationship between historical necessity and human activity, the Namibian people have given the only answer not in philosophical but practical terms, that is, that their survival and freedom depended on apprehending necessity and translating necessity into practical activity. Namibian women are being guided by this philosophy, and have translated it into concrete social and productive activities both inside Namibia and in the rear base.

First, they analysed the structure of production in Namibia, concluding that economically the occupation regime has deliberately fostered a two-level economy, one heavily capitalised and concentrating on extraction of raw materials for external consumption, and the other, the subsistence economy, denied capital and technical assistance and intended for the bulk of the African population forced to eke out a living in Bantustans.<sup>34</sup>

Having established the character of the economy and the relations of production therein, Namibian women understood that they would have to engage in production themselves in order to be integrated in the productive process and hence in society as equals. Inside the country the women would have to take part in productive activity in economic sectors traditionally the

preserve of men. In the rear base, women's participation in all sectors of productive activity is now a fact, save that there is more still to be done in order to increase the numbers of women in some of the sectors and activities.

Like elsewhere in Africa, Namibian women have traditionally been excluded from agriculture, except at subsistence level; from production in factories; from fishing at any level of the economy; and consequently from leadership in the productive activity of the society. But the colonial and apartheid policies have had as their side effects developments unforeseen by the oppressors. The repression and violence against the Namibian people resulted in a mass exodus of men, women and children into neighbouring countries. Their experiences there under SWAPO have altered their social and political perspectives, and their productive roles in a progressive and liberating way. For those who remained inside the country this same repression, manifested in such practices as contract labour and bantustanization of life, created other exigencies.

Women inside Namibia are forced to confront life like one big emergency where every minute is a struggle for survival. Bantustans have little or no social amenities. Women have to struggle to keep their children alive; they struggle to keep them healthy; they struggle to get them Bantu education, with many going without even this fourth class education; they struggle to clothe and feed them from the meagre crop and the meagre wage of the husband's contract labour. The struggle by Namibian women to break out of this social and economic imprisonment has shown itself in what some women have done to supplement their incomes while their husbands are away on contract labour. For example, subsistence fishing has traditionally been a man's activity. However, contract labour took the men away for long periods "and women had to adapt to this new situation by engaging in fishing to survive."<sup>35</sup> Commenting on this, one Namibian woman observer said:

"At first, the women used to be afraid of hippos. But now, they prepare the net, get into the dug-out canoe and cast out the net. The following morning they would go back to collect the fish and clean it before drying it for the market."<sup>36</sup>

Women inside Namibia have also stepped up what we might call small home industries production of basketry and embroidery work to supplement their incomes. The point here is that the situation has taught the women how to survive. This knowledge, no matter how little, goes to build the reservoir of knowledge which must be created for the essential transformation of the social and productive relations after independence to ensure liberation for all Namibians and economic well-being for the nation.

Apart from knowledge gained from their activity in production, women inside the country have been swept into a new role whose social educative consequences will have a great impact on political mobilization and productive work in an independent Namibia. We refer here to the social, political and economic infrastructure which has been set up by the people to support SWAPO freedom fighters. Invariably, at the centre of this infrastructure are women. They educate the masses on the necessity for the armed struggle, following which they mobilize the masses to serve and be served by the freedom fighters. Social services have been organised in the fighting zones; food for the needy; free medical services administered by the freedom fighters; shelter and food for the fighters; and intelligence work for the fighters. This is a field university unparalleled by any institution of learning. The greatest lesson the Namibian women and men are learning in this activity is self-reliance. They are seeing how cooperation solves many of their problems; they are learning that they can improve their agricultural output

when they follow collective work methods as taught by the fighters; and that they can provide their own social services provided they work as a community and ask for medical supplies from the freedom fighters. It is the construction of this social, political and economic infrastructure which the South African occupation regime wants to prevent when it carries out indiscriminate bomb and small weapons attacks on villages in the war zone and on refugee camps in the rear base. But the lessons already learned can never be wiped out of the minds of the survivors.

In the rear base, women's leadership in the social and productive activity is now more clearly defined, and is developing. In the countries where Namibians are in revolutionary exile the women have been able to achieve more than their counterparts inside Namibia have been able to because of the restricting colonial conditions. However, despite these restricting conditions, Namibian women inside the country have shown what is possible when people use existing conditions as a challenge towards new knowledge and, in this case, higher levels of social and economic productivity.

In Angola and Zambia, Namibian women have demonstrated what leadership, ideological clarity, organisation, mobilization and training can achieve in social and material productivity. Since 1974, women have come out of Namibia in large numbers either as refugees or as volunteers to fight in the ranks of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN). Whether they are PLAN combatants or refugees, the women are all taking part in social and productive activity. Those in refugee camps, have, under the guidance of the SWAPO Women's Council, organised and set themselves to provide social services, technical skills, and to produce enough food for the camp residents.

1) Social Services

Under the direction of the Women's Council, women provide the greater part of the social services in Namibian refugee camps. This was not a haphazard

or chance development, but a product of SWAPO's political and ideological outlook. SWAPO's Political Programme lays out the framework within which social and productive work should be carried out during the liberation struggle and in the reconstruction after independence. In relevant sections the Programme provides for "the speedy development of the Namibian productive forces," "the cultivation of a spirit of self-reliance among our people," and the provision of free health and social services for all.<sup>37</sup>

In pursuance of a speedy development of Namibian productive forces, Namibian women are playing an important role in the creation of a politically conscious, educated and skilled personpower for work in the rear base camps as well as in an independent Namibia.

#### Education

Everyone is familiar with the criminal denial of education to the Namibian people by the racist Pretoria authorities. The consequences of this denial have been devastating on the Namibian people. Few have received the so-called basic education. It is not even basic because it is qualitatively inferior to that which the apartheid authorities give to white children. In some cases this Bantu Education introduced in 1955 has been worse than no education at all. "Bantu Education is based on an official white educational theory that the purpose of black education is to bring up Africans to accept their oppressed social status and to be content with modest needs and a ccess limited to the 'less demanding' duties in society".<sup>38</sup>

In the face of this deliberate dis-education, mis-education and cultural genocide against the Namibian people, Namibian women resolved to seek education for their children and for themselves from any source,

including from themselves. At the kindergarten, primary and secondary school levels the women have taken the initiative to provide the facilities and personnel to teach Namibians in revolutionary exile. This is in fulfilment of SWAPO's education programme which calls for mass education including for the very young. The women have called for the organisation of scholarship programmes for all levels of education and training in various countries. Cognisant of the fact that under apartheid "the women are always the last to be considered in matters of training, leadership, responsibility and employment"<sup>39</sup>, Namibian women assessed that without education and training the revolutionary gains which women have made against the enemy and within the liberation struggle would be dissipated at independence if women could not come forward with qualified cadres in all respects. These gains might also be squandered if nationally the Namibian Revolution could not produce competent leaders, planners, scholars, activists, teachers and workers.

It is as a direct result of the work, planning and consultation with the overall SWAPO leadership that "SWAPO has succeeded in organising several crash training programmes around the world, through which thousands of Namibian women are being trained as engineers, doctors, lawyers, medical assistants, nurses, radiographers, teachers, administrators, accountants, radio broadcasters, communication officers, mechanics, electricians, typists, stenographers and drivers"<sup>40</sup>

While taking the initiative in planning, drawing up projects and raising funds for training programmes, Namibian women have also demonstrated their academic ability once the opportunity is granted. They have successfully competed for places in training institutions, and subsequently proved their mettle in the classroom. For the first time in the history of decolonisation, the Namibian Liberation Movement can boast well over 50% of their trainees at UNIN<sup>1/2</sup> for civil service jobs as women. Of the 400 that have completed their training at UNIN, about 50% of these are women. This is a tremendous achievement

<sup>1/</sup> United Nations Institute for Namibia, based in Lusaka.

in two senses: the granting of this opportunity to women is manifestation of a foresight hitherto lacking in now independent African states; and it is evidence of the great strides which SWAPO has made politically in trying to lay a foundation for the building of equality in an independent Namibia.

These successes led the President of SWAPO, Comrade Sam Nujoma to state proudly at the Third Graduation Ceremony in 1982 for students at UNIN that:

"...Until about the late 1950's we did not have a single indigenous graduate in Namibia.

But through our own efforts, as I stated in 1971 when I addressed the Security Council of the United Nations, we have done more in a short time than the racist South African regime has done during the entire period that it has been mismanaging the affairs of our country. We have managed in the last 21 years of SWAPO's existence to produce through friendly governments and international organisations, medical doctors, scientists, engineers, technical cadres and Ph.Ds. At present we have over 200 Namibians with university degrees. This is a record of which we are very proud and which can only shame South Africa and its allies. We have established a full educational system, starting from kindergarten to what you may term a higher institution of learning, which the U.N. Institute for Namibia represents.<sup>41</sup>

In order to emphasize the importance of education, the SWAPO Women's Council at its Nyango Conference unanimously decided that education in refugee camps should not only be free but also compulsory for all age groups.<sup>42</sup>

However, scaling the heights of academic education has been only one of the concerns of Namibian women. They have also not neglected the academic and political education of the young and old in order to prepare them to absorb the shocks and waves of the struggle as well as to keep constantly clear in the minds of the masses the objectives of the struggle and the nature of the enemy. Issues of ideological consciousness and social morality are at the centre of the programme of political education for all SWAPO cadres.

SWAPO Women's Council Conference and Workshops invariably raise issues of ideological consciousness and social morality because these are bases for mobilization and for creating a social fibre which is against all forms of oppression and exploitation. In the words of Comrade Netumbo: "The Council is striving constantly to raise the level of the Namibian women's political consciousness to ensure that the right of Namibia's women to participate fully in all political, cultural, social and productive activities of our society, is always at the centre of policy decisions. It is only when the women themselves are armed with a high level of political consciousness that our movement can guarantee that reactionary ideas such as male chauvinism and female docility will have no place in a liberated Namibia."<sup>43</sup> If women as 'mothers of the nation' are politically conscious the nation will be politically conscious! Out of this political consciousness will flow the motivation for productive activity essential for the reconstruction of Namibia and the creation of a classless society.

#### Child Care

A great deal of emphasis is put into child care. The morality of a nation and its fundamental social objectives can be read in how it treats its children. The SWAPO Health Department has provided women medical personnel to develop a child care programme in which the main emphasis is teaching mothers about health and how to raise children.



But child care in a progressive society is not the responsibility of the mother alone. It is the responsibility of the society as a whole. Consequently, there are already Namibian women who have been given minimum skills in how to take care of children. But further training is required so that these women can plan whole child care programmes where none exist now, and thereafter take this knowledge and experience into independent Namibia. The women are planning day care centres, nursery schools and adjunct facilities in order to realize this important social objective of the struggle. Alongside this, they are planning increasing nutrition education which is vital if children are to be brought up free of diseases which result from malnutrition. Here again the women have identified the primary needs as the training of personnel and the provision of an infrastructure. As part of the campaign to realize these goals, the SWAPO Women's Council has appealed to development organisations, governments and humanitarian organisations for funds and material support for more child care centres, pre-school facilities, training scholarships, and for teaching aids. The appeal has been made, and is still being made, on the basis of the practical experience of Namibian women engaged in these tasks everyday in the camps.<sup>44</sup>

Necessary adjuncts to child care programmes or to the general education programme are kindergartens. The women in charge of the programme have observed that even though the kindergartens are there, "parents are the first and important teachers for their children followed by other people caring for and teaching the child".<sup>45</sup> This statement puts the issue in its correct perspective, that is, parents have the primary responsibility for raising their children properly to become responsible members of society. The rest of the society plays a supportive role and, where the conduct of parents may be detrimental to the proper upbringing of a child, a role of in loco parentis is played by society.

As in other areas concerning the proper upbringing and education of Namibian children, their mothers appeal for more support to train kindergarten teachers and to purchase toys. Meanwhile, the first regional conference of SWAPO Women's Council at the Namibia Health and Education Centre at Nyango in 1982 resolved "that we should not only rely on toys which are supplied but we should try to make our own toys from old clothes, old tyres and even from old bags."<sup>46</sup>

#### Family Planning

For some time now, Namibian women have recognised that part of the reason why some children do not receive proper care is that some couples do not plan their families. As a result children are sometimes not properly spaced leading to the mother being unable to care for both young children. Once again, the women have requested SWAPO leadership and the Health Department to make family planning compulsory to all Namibian women, whether married or unmarried.<sup>47</sup>

#### Administration

Realising that quite often grand schemes of revolutionary ideas collapse not for want of support by the masses but from incompetent or uninvolved administration, Namibian women have called for increased training for administrators and also greater involvement by women in matters that affect women directly. In the words of Comrade Maria Nangolo, "The affairs of any society can only be best managed when both men and women are participating on an equal basis".<sup>48</sup> She also noted "that the role played by women in administration can promote development of international cooperation among progressive forces of the whole world in the struggle for the preservation of peace and social progress..."<sup>49</sup> It is now a fact that in

the SWAPO Administration, from the Headquarters to offices abroad and at district and branch levels, "women are playing their part as administrators, diplomats, secretaries...."<sup>50</sup>, educators, medical officers, transport and communications officers and workers.

ii) Producing For the People

Namibian women in refugee camps not only take part in providing social services for themselves, they also take part in producing food and commodities which can be sold to raise funds for other projects. The role of Namibian women in production has long been acknowledged. They grow maize and vegetables to feed camp residents. They also create with their own hands articles, such as blankets, table cloths, furniture covers, rugs, mats and other items which are consumed in the camps or sold to raise funds. This productive activity takes place in every Namibian refugee camp, particularly at Nyango in Zambia and Kwanza Sul in Angola.

Namibian women in exile have broken many barriers. One of them is in mechanized agriculture. "Already, in SWAPO camps in Angola and Zambia, women are actively engaged in food crop production to feed the camp residents."<sup>51</sup> They have even entered mechanized agriculture where they use tractors. One of the women says:

"We are two women who do this and the rest are men. But, I must say that many more women will be trained. When I started, I used to say that tractor ploughing is a man's job. After a while, however, I began to like it because I was even taught how to fix the tractor when it broke down."<sup>52</sup>

At first, this may appear only as token participation, but what is significant is the women's preparedness to take and bring around the Namibian community to accept this principled position which can only become a new

take-off point in the struggle for equality. Moreover, this activity is a firm foundation for SWAPO's land policy and agricultural programme in an independent Namibia. All must produce! The example of the two women with tractors is amplified by others using less mechanized methods. The agricultural section in Nyango, which has more women than men, boasts the ability on several occasions to have been able to supply UNIN and SWAPO offices with a surplus of vegetables.

What is needed now is a massive training programme beyond the UNIN programme, and as a supplement to it, so that large numbers of women can be ready for agricultural production at both technical and administrative levels. This should increase the productivity of women and meet more and more the needs of the people in the camps without relying too much on outside assistance. The Women's Council has called for greater involvement of women in agriculture and other productive activities. To ensure this, areas of vocational training ought not be selected based on the academic qualifications of a candidate nor sex, but on the capacity of an individual to pick up practical knowledge useful directly in production.

d) The Armed Struggle

Participation by women in the armed struggle has increased steadily over the years. If it is a duty to liberate one's people the Namibian women claim it; if it is a privilege they also claim it! They have asserted their rights with the result that they are today equals with their menfolk in PLAN. Comrade President Sam Nujoma explains why women are taking part in the liberation struggle. As he puts it:

"The Namibian women are part and parcel of the oppressed Namibian population. As such, like all other people who are deprived of their rights, humiliated and degraded, they identify themselves with aims and objectives

of the struggle, both political and armed, waged by SWAPO. Consequently, it is SWAPO's duty to educate and to mobilize politically women, youth and all sections of the Namibian population, in order to strengthen its manpower so as to fight effectively for the total liberation of Namibia.

Today, Namibian women are playing a very significant role in the national liberation struggle. For example, in the People's Liberation Army (PLAN), women are not only active combatants at the front, but have also risen to positions of responsibility in the army.<sup>#53</sup>

The deep commitment by women to the liberation of Namibia is shown by how some of them have arranged their priorities. Some insist on fighting now and going to school later, even when they are too young to be in PLAN. Others have even tried to misrepresent their ages in order to qualify for the battle front. It is this unwavering commitment by large numbers of women which could not be ignored even by the more traditionalist men in the liberation movement. Moreover, the women's leadership in SWAPO has kept pressing for all-round opportunities for women's participation in the struggle. It is against this background that we find today in the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN) women combatants in a significant number. There [are] women members of the Military Council of PLAN where operational strategy and tactics are formulated and reviewed.<sup>54</sup>

This right to sacrifice for one's country and for the freedom of generations to come has not been won by Namibian women without a struggle. Apart from struggling to have women as members of PLAN, there had to be constant political struggle to discourage male fighters from looking down on female fighters. At the same time there had to be a struggle to get women fighters to live down their own feelings of unfounded inferiority

and to accept shouldering heavy responsibilities.<sup>55</sup> That struggle has not been won yet, but the gains made are such that we cannot contemplate a regression. The struggle continues. The male fighters who at one point would have done everything to try and disobey or get around the orders from their female commanders are today accepting the orders without question. Constant criticism and self-criticism has been the basis of solving these problems. Undoubtedly some of these problems will continue which is why the final call to all Namibian women is to prepare themselves for the new struggle in the post-independence period.

V. INDEPENDENCE AND RECONSTRUCTION: THE FINAL CALL TO ALL NAMIBIAN WOMEN

The liberation struggle has released many ideas and energies of a large section of the Namibian population. Many targets have been set in the social, political and economic spheres for the Namibian society after independence. Building on the foundations laid by the liberation struggle, women look forward to even greater equality with their menfolk. But this will not be automatic.

a) A New Stage and New Contradictions

Once the contradiction between colonial oppression and the struggle for independence has been resolved in favour of independence, new contradictions will take the place of the old. Within the protracted Revolution being waged by SWAPO there will be revolutions of rising expectations as a result of independence. National independence is really only the beginning, with the struggle for national reconstruction even more difficult and protracted.

"For true liberation, the attainment of state power is only the beginning. Africa has learnt to its cost that merely to unite national forces to get rid of a colonial power is not enough, because the structures of exploitation on which colonial domination is built have been systematically and deeply embedded in the colonised society.

SWAPO has faced these challenges. It has come to strength at a time when not only have the disastrous consequences of false decolonisation been revealed on the African continent, but also at a time when alternative directions are being taken by its neighbours in Southern Africa who share a similar tradition of a long armed liberation struggle against colonial regimes." <sup>56</sup>

What will be the demands of the peasantry whose economic base has long been destroyed by apartheid? What of the workers, poorly paid and half the time? What will be the reaction of the small but important petty bourgeois class up until now chafing under apartheid restrictions and unable to build a solid economic

and political power base? What will be the effect of a universal demand for education by Namibian youths up to now denied even the most minimum of education? What will be the effect of a sudden upsurge in demands for higher wages, better housing, better transport, better health services, etc., on the plans of a SWAPO government. barely a few months in Windhoek? Indeed, what are the chances that the voices of women which are ringing clear today may not be heard above the din and stampede for special privileges? These are the new contradictions at the new stage of social development. How they are resolved will determine whether the positive experiences of the liberation struggle and the lessons now embedded in the minds of thousands of Namibians are not squandered.

In more specific terms, it is worth noting that we cannot take for granted that the experiences of women in revolutionary exile and in the armed struggle will automatically be accepted by those women who have not had the experience. The struggle may even be sharper between the two groups than it may be between women and men. The issue here will be the sort of tactics that can be used to mobilize all the women first around questions about which there is the widest agreement. The goal will be to increase involvement in productive activity. Underlying all this will have to be a clear political and ideological position which leads inexorably to a society of equals - a classless society.

b) Reconstructing Namibian Society

The twin objectives of the liberation struggle led by SWAPO has always been to gain Namibian independence and, in the course of this protracted struggle, to plant the seed for the complete transformation of the Namibian society. In other words, the struggle is a national liberation revolution which has drawn into its vortex the Namibian popular masses fighting at once for independence and against imperialism and monopoly capital. Therefore "the essence of any revolution, be it social or national, is defined by a fundamental change in the whole basis and structure of society, a change in which decisive political and economic power passes from the hands of an obsolescent or declining ruling class, which has outlived its days, into the hands of a new and



advancing class ( or an alliance of classes ) which seeks to take society forward to a new phase of development."<sup>57</sup> A change of class power is at the core of any revolution.

In Namibia, in the initial stage power will be transferred from the capitalist colonial settlers and their multinational corporate allies who occupy the position of ownership of the means of production in the Namibian economy" - to an alliance of peasants, workers, and progressive elements of the petty bourgeoisie and intellectuals. In the second stage of the revolution, if the revolution has been successful, power must pass into the hands of the workers. The dominant features of this transfer of power must already have begun to grow within the womb of earlier stages. Thus "while national liberation constitutes the chief mobilising factor in the present stage of the struggle in Namibia, the fight to overthrow the colonial and racist autocracy in our country has an objective coincidence with the commitment to the elimination of all forms of undemocratic practices by which our people have been denied the right and power to decide upon questions of policy and the nation's course."<sup>58</sup> In short, democracy will be the sine qua non for the success of the reconstruction programme.

In order to help carry the struggle through these stages Namibian women will have to strengthen further their organisation, politicise and mobilize the whole nation. They will set their sights first on changing attitudes and values in order to free the population from the mentally and socially dehumanizing philosophy of apartheid. And using their training and experience in the rear base, women must begin to teach and practice self-reliance in growing food, in providing services, and in training people for different skills.

A vast but focussed literacy programme is one in which women will no doubt take a leading role given their accumulated experience in this with the refugee population. It will require that they first train a core group of trainers who will subsequently lead literacy teams throughout the country. The literacy campaign must itself become a take-off point for hundreds of other projects in formal and non-formal education; in raising the level and

quality of communication; in health education; in mass mobilization; and in instilling the ethic of hard work in the people.

Above all, women should begin thinking now about how to build a strong party out of the present liberation movement - SWAPO. Without a strong party, and one that continues to be guided by the precepts laid down in the SWAPO Political Programme, few if any of the grand designs in reconstruction could ever be achieved. Building a new Namibia will be a challenge to all Namibians of all races, colours and creeds, but there is no greater challenge than knowing and stating boldly who one is and on which side of the working people one stands. On the basis of such knowledge Namibian women and men shall see clearly that before they can be anything that receives respect from the world they would have to consolidate the Namibian nation which the enemy has been working furiously to fragment. This entails the ability to create a national identity and cohesion that confronts the enemy with a wall of unity among the Namibian people. Only when there is national political cohesion can plans for transforming the economy have an impact. The cultural front in which women have played such a leading role during the liberation struggle will remain an important front in building national unity and political cohesion among the leading forces in the democratic revolution.

More than ever before the movement for a broad popular participation in all reconstruction tasks will have to be deepened. The women have so far played an exemplary role in this regard. It will be the task of the SWAPO Women's Council to broaden and democratize the movement, encouraging initiative from below and providing leadership for the development of ideas and their implementation as projects.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The paper has tried to show that the Namibian Women's present militancy against Pretoria's occupation regime in Namibia is in many ways a tradition handed down from generation to generation since the first colonial incursion into Namibia. It shows also that the methods adopted against colonial authorities changed, improving with the growth of social and political awareness. Without dwelling on the point, the paper concludes indirectly that the conditions under which people live and their experiences are the motor for what they become aware of and how, if it is negative, they should combat it. Therefore necessity is always at the root of a search to the solution of a problem. But that necessity has first of all to be apprehended and thereafter actions initiated to seek solutions.

The Women's role in the development of the liberation struggle in Namibia is at once a history of anti-colonialism in Namibia as well as a history of struggle by women for equality with men. The women have made much progress on both of these fronts, but more particularly in their participation in all aspects of the liberation struggle. Feudal ideas still persist among both Namibian men and women. This will be one of the areas of struggle for equality in the post-independence reconstruction. Old ideas die hard, but they will die in the end, and this is how Namibian women view their protracted struggle.

In the meantime, in order to keep consolidating any gains made, the women have sought the formalisation of their participation in the liberation movement by way of representation at the highest levels of SWAPO's organs, including the Military Council. Thus formalisation is not only correct, it serves as a political mobilising function far greater than where women participate en masse but without their rôle being formally recognized.

Apart from seeking both the formalisation of their participation and an ever increased physical presence at all levels of the struggle, Namibian women have demonstrated leadership and initiative. Their practice has shown that it is indeed possible to be self-reliant in development. Self-reliance projects initiated, planned and implemented by the women have been very successful. In many cases the projects are now prototypes for future development projects in an independent Namibia. We have in mind the day-care centres, kindergarten schools, adolescent and secondary schools, Health centres, farming and manufacturing projects.

In the light of the success in these projects and the obvious continuing and increasing need for trained personnel to work in the projects, the SWAPO Women's Council has appealed and continues to appeal for greater material and financial support from development agencies, governments and private sources. This effort deserves support if only because of the spirit and objectives that underly it.

The broader objectives of what we may call pilot projects in the rear base are to transplant the personnel and the experience into Namibia at independence where the projects will be examples of what can be achieved by a people united by a common goal for the goal of the whole society. As for possible types of machineries for achieving these aims, Susan Nghidinwa says:

"Our anticipation for future machineries for the integration of women in development in an independent Namibia will be determined by our accumulated experience and the objective conditions in the rest of the non-liberated zones of Namibia. But it is our firm conviction that prior to establishing any state machineries, there ought first to be a fundamental agreement on the ideology which requires the equal treatment of the sexes. There ought to be also a vigorous education campaign on sex and class oppression and exploitation. In many ways, this value position and practice will itself suggest the type of machinery most appropriate, in view of the differences in the objective conditions in each country, for the integration of women in development. SWAPO has already laid the foundation for this continuing task. The struggle will be long, but victory is certain."

FOOTNOTES

1. Alvin Kienetz, Nineteenth Century South West Africa as a German Settlement Colony (Part I), Doctoral Thesis, University of Minnesota, December 1975, p.174
2. See Alfred Babing and Hans-Dieter Brauer, Namibia (Verlag Zeit im Bild, Dresden, 1981), pp.28-29
3. H. Vedder, South West Africa in Early Times (1938), p.46
4. Ibid., p.55
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