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African women gasp for air

March 08, 2007 01:11 PM

One of the quickest way to get in the bad graces of men is to try and promote women rights or legislation. You do not have to look far to encounter various acts or chauvinism or misogyny. They occur all around us each day. Women complain that men do not listen to them, are selfish or mistreat them. Some of if is true but to make a sweeping statement to that effect is wrong. It depends with your specific situation. With today being International Women's Day, I have decided to take a look at different stories relating to the African woman.

In Kenya, it is [reported](#) that 42.9% percent of women have their spouses make decisions regarding their health and 37.9% have their husbands make unilateral decisions on daily household expenditure. With most men controlling the purse strings in the home, they are free to do what they see fit with the money. If the man is an alcoholic, then chances are, the children go to bed hungry on some nights.

All Africa carries a [story today](#) that a Kenyan woman doesn't receive fair justice in the criminal courts especially with regards to rape trials. Due to technicalities, convicts escape punishment while the women suffer in shame and silence. In 2006, a [rape law](#) was passed with sections changed to prevent the outlawing of marital rape and female genital mutilation.

Liberia [reported](#) that rape is currently the most serious crime plaguing the nation with and average of eight crimes reported per week. This is a very telling statement. To have violence against women as the most active serious crime in a nation says a lot about the society. I am sure there is a huge number of women who choose to remain silent and the statistics do not classify marital or date rape. Protection for women has to become a rallying cry for the leadership of the country and actual measures need to be put in place to protect, prosecute and punish law breakers.

In a fairly progressive country like Kenya, it is a wonder that [female genital mutilation](#) still exists. While some tribes want to stick with their traditions and initiate women into maturity, I think there are better systems and lessons for initiation instead of this form of brutality (tribes that carry out the practice don't see it as a form of mutilation but the term is used to indicate the practice is a violation of human rights for girls and women). The fear associated with the practice, potential infections, scarring and even infertility are good enough reasons to stop it.

Forced marriages is another issue still in contention. There are 11 or 12 year olds sold into marriage. Parents will do it due to poverty. By "selling" their children, they stand a chance to earn some money due to dowry paid and the added benefit of one less mouth to feed. But at this young age, what can such a child do for anyone. They are still dependents with largely immature minds that can't grasp motherhood or the responsibility of caring for a young one. [Rebecca Lolosoli](#) is a woman in Samburu, Kenya who has created a village to shelter women running away from forced marriages.

Female participation in leadership positions especially parliamentary positions has

steadily been increasing. This is a way to reduce gender inequality and promote legislation that are focused on women and families. There has been marked growth within the past decade but worldwide, the percentage of women legislators stands at seventeen which is a paltry sum in relation to their male counterparts. Still early to call how things will turn out but Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (the first elected woman president in the continent of Africa) has done a superb job as the president of Liberia since assuming office in 2006.

Within the job market, it is [reported](#) that the number of women currently working is at an all time high although a gap exists between the number of men versus women workers. Women still have lower paying jobs and occupy less management positions than men. In the world's poorest regions, women still hold the highest share of contributing family workers in total employment. This is a huge disparity either due to the fact that they are single parent family units or the men are out fighting or spending their earnings on other activities than family.

More has to be done to improve the lives of women within our societies. The issues mentioned above are just some of the problems women face daily in Africa. While there has been progress in improving living standards, more can be done to improve the lives of women.