



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Kenyan women sex strike against government's paralysis, 2009

Time period notes: The sex strike lasted seven days

April
2009
to: May
2009

Country: Kenya

Goals:

In general, the women wanted to end the stalemate the government was experiencing due to the divergent vision and policy of Kenya's two leaders. They wanted to drive the attention of their leaders to the urgent issues of corruption and poverty.

They also laid out direct demands:

“That the two principals respect the people and nation of Kenya by ending forthwith the little power games that undermine the dignity, safety and democratic spaces of our country

That the president and prime minister give respect, full intent, interpretation and observation to the spirit and letter of the National Accord and reconciliation

That the two principals show commitment, good faith, and leadership in the implementation of the accord by making the interests of the nation paramount

A responsive, sensitive and people-driven leadership and coalition government that is decisive, clear about the country's priorities, willing to sacrifice individual ambition for the greater good of the nation and which represents a force that inspires confidence among the country's people

That the reform agenda be fast tracked and given priority over all else

That Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka step aside and refuse to allow himself be used to defeat the good intentions of the National Accord.”

This statement was signed by leaders of all of the organizations.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 004. Signed public statements
- 057. Lysistratic nonaction

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 057. Lysistratic nonaction

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 057. Lysistratic nonaction

Methods in 4th segment:

- 057. Lysistratic nonaction

Methods in 5th segment:

- 057. Lysistratic nonaction

Methods in 6th segment:

- 020. Prayer and worship
- 057. Lysistratic nonaction

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Kenyan women

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Rukia Subow, the chairman of the Women's Development Organization.

Partners:

The Coalition of Violence Against Women (COVAW), CAUCUS for Women Political Leadership (CAUCUS), Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW), Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya (FIDA-K), Tomorrow's Child Initiative (TCI), Women in Law and Development (WILDAF), African Women and Child Features (AWC), Development Through Media (DTM), Young Women Leadership Institute (YWLI), Maendeleo Ya Wanawake and the National Council of Women in Kenya (NCWK).

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Ida Odinga (the prime minister's wife) and Lucy Kibaki (the president's wife).

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- CAUCUS for Women Political Leadership (CAUCUS)
- Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW)
- Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya (FIDA-K)
- The Coalition of Violence Against Women (COVAW)
- Tomorrow's Child Initiative (TCI)
- Women in Law and Development

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: *Approximately 1 day*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

President Kibaki and Prime Minister Odinga.

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

None known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

3 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

They achieved their first important step: the discourse between the president and the prime minister and their knowledge that they were being held accountable.

By 2009, post-election violence had killed 1,500 people and forced 600,000 from their homes. In order to end this violence, President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga agreed to share leadership power in Kenya. However, this relationship began to deteriorate due to the leaders' divergent policies and visions for the country. In April 2009, activist women in Kenya took matters into their own hands and organized a seven-day sex strike to force their leaders to reconcile and move forward. They were tired of the government's paralysis, indecisiveness, and bad leadership that was getting in the way of security in the country. As the politicians argued over policies and procedures, the women and children were the ones being disproportionately affected by corruption and poverty.

The sex strike was called by the Women's Development Organization, Kenya's oldest and largest women's rights group. Later, the sex strike was organized by G10, Kenya's national women's movement that was directed by a coalition of ten women's organizations: COVAW, CAUCUS, CREAM, FIDA-K, TCI, WILDAF, AWC, DTM, YWLI, Maendeleo Ya Wanawake and NCWK. They directly laid out their demands:

- "That the two principals respect the people and nation of Kenya by ending forthwith the little power games that undermine the dignity, safety and democratic spaces of our country
- That the president and prime minister give respect, full intent, interpretation and observation to the spirit and letter of the National Accord and reconciliation
- That the two principals show commitment, good faith, and leadership in the implementation of the accord by making the interests of the nation paramount
- A responsive, sensitive and people-driven leadership and coalition government that is decisive, clear about the country's priorities, willing to sacrifice individual ambition for the greater good of the nation and which represents a force that inspires confidence among the country's people
- That the reform agenda be fast tracked and given priority over all else
- That Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka step aside and refuse to allow himself to be used to defeat the good intentions of the National Accord."

These women began their protest on the impetus of what they concluded to be the realities facing Kenya. First, they saw their country's vulnerability to attack from the East. Second, they understood Kenya's vulnerability to the ambitions of the West in the growing global economy. Third, these women understood the poverty within the nation that left millions of people hungry and hopeless. These women had decided they would not tolerate the government's movement to take Kenya back into a state of chaos and violence that would leave them even more vulnerable to the effects of the above. If Kenya were to continue under this line of leadership, it was headed towards status as a failed state and the collapse of the governing coalition.

The women's organizations were not the only parties involved in the sex strike. They had looked at the issues and decided that a sex strike was the answer because it would have power in every household. On 30 April, the member groups of G10 sent out a call to action that was signed by the leaders of each of the organizations. This call was directed towards the general female public of Kenya. This included the prostitutes because the members of the G10 had already made a plan to pay them for their lost wages. Both the president's and the prime minister's wives participated in the strike fully supporting the campaign. Their support helped bring in additional big-name media coverage of the strike.

The sex strike lasted a full week until 7 May. It ended with a joint prayer session where President Kibaki and Prime Minister Odinga finally agreed to talk. This opening of discourse was an important first step towards the fulfillment of their demands.

NOTE: The ten women's groups in the coalition were: *The Coalition of Violence Against Women (COVAW)*, *CAUCUS for Women Political Leadership (CAUCUS)*, *Centre for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW)*, *Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya (FIDA-K)*, *Tomorrow's Child Initiative (TCI)*, *Women in Law and Development (WILDAF)*, *African Women and Child Features (AWC)*, *Development Through Media (DTM)*, *Young Women Leadership Institute (YWLI)*, *Maendeleo Ya Wanawake and the National Council of Women in Kenya (NCWK)*.

Research Notes

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