

## Understanding the Status and Roles of Women in Tanzania \*

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Although Tanzania has been open to women's struggles for almost two decades, those who understand the basic tenets of the struggles are relatively few. Still fewer are those who are capable and see the importance of writing a thoughtful and knowledgeable account of Tanzania women.

This bibliography admirably fills a major gap which exists in the process of understanding Tanzanian women's conditions and the desired changes. Written by two committed and long-standing researchers on women's problems, the book is intended to be widely read as a guide by academicians and leaders at all levels and to facilitate co-operative efforts in appreciating and responding to women's needs.

Leafing through the book, one notices that it is a bibliography with a difference. Each section is preceeded by an analytical essay which draws together the debates pervading in the following theses. These essays make the book easy to comprehend, especially for students of women's struggles, and important for those without time to develop their own analyses. It is also useful for selecting what to read from the material, both published and unpublished, available on a wide variety of issues.

The book is organised into two parts preceeded by a brief introduction. Part One addresses the nature of the struggles of women in Tanzania. It poses the questions precisely within relevant sub-themes such as the oppression of women; the struggles of working and peasant women; and, more importantly, the conceptualisation of women as a problem of analysis and action. This last topic is one often omitted by researchers but the authors here provide a good foundation for further development of the issue.

Part Two presents, in fourteen sub-themes, the writings collected on the question of women. These include women's projects and co-operatives; ideology; education; legal issues; political participation; biological reproduction and sexuality; family and domestic labour; health and nutrition; and resources. To the outsider, the most interesting aspect is likely to be the remarkable growth of projects and co-operative activities on the part of women as a promising solution to some of their problems.

Certain observations can be made on the analytical essays of the compilers. Firstly, that the conceptual articulation sketched in the introduction seeks response from others in its interpretation of the positions of women and men in production and reproduction. Reaction is also demanded elsewhere in the essays when the authors posit that the pre-capitalist era has been incorrectly problematised and, therefore, needs to be reassessed. Secondly, from a variety of the literature, that women are less motivated than men to participate in

Mascarenhas, O. and M. Mbilinyi 1983 *Women in Tanzania. An Analytical Bibliography*  
SIAS: Uppsala.

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development or to be self-reliant. This is most apparent in the sections on legal issues, education and skills and development of projects and co-operatives. In addition, the book highlights the need for further research to reveal more specific problems and solutions. Thirdly, the reader is made aware of how the direction of development of Tanzania is unconsciously maintaining the status quo of women in society. Finally, the bibliography provides a readable and perceptive insight into the achievements of women in Tanzania and what remains to be done.

The book serves several purposes: to provide an information base for the examination of the question of women in Tanzania society; to share research findings and widen readership; to facilitate the location of material for libraries and researchers; and to reduce the workload for all those interested in women's issues. The book fails, however, to provide an area index which would have highlighted the need for such specific studies.

This book is a commitment to the continuing struggles of women, bringing together as it does the research results and evidences of women's struggles and by examining the conflicting ideological positions. In doing so, women have been encouraged to talk about themselves and their ambitions, conflicts and expectations and to move away from fear.

To fulfil its role, the book must now be widely distributed in both Kiswahili as well as in English and so stimulate greater readership and better understanding of the women's question in Tanzania by students, academics, politicians, policy-makers, implementers and, of course, women.

