

# "Because Women Can Run Countries"

A leading American economic development consultant and personal friend of President Clinton, Meg Armstrong, recently visited Namibia to share her views about ways in which women can improve their public speaking skills. She spoke to *Wabei Siyolwe-Hopson*.

**Sister:** When I looked at your agenda here I saw that you will be meeting with various Namibian women's groups to talk about Strategy skills. How will your point of view relate to the rural Namibian woman or are you just going to address the small number of women who are in positions to use performance and presentation skills?

**Meg:** My observation is that if women emerge at the top, all women are advantaged - women in the village, in the shops, women everywhere. A strategy is needed. In the United States it took twenty-five years of a very deliberate strategy by women to develop the momentum, to develop the skills, to help the women that were on the move.

For women to advance in any society we have to help each other. We must help women below us, women above us and women beside us.

**Sister:** Do you think that the women's movement in the United States in the 70's

helped unify women? Apartheid here has separated people, making solidarity work among women more difficult. There is a lack of trust between women. What advice would you give to Namibia being a multi-racial society with this kind of history?

**Meg:** My advice to women in Namibia is to take the lead in working together in a non-racial setting. That is, women need to reach out to each other regardless of background, colour or religion.

Women need to look for unifying agendas and to remember that reasonable



people will disagree about many things.

Finally, don't ask every organisation to do everything for everyone. If one goal is to elect women into parliament, there may be women who are keen to be involved in organisations that help candidates with issues, with money, and with skills to do this.

In the United States part of the success of women, particularly in elected office, is that there are so many organisations of women that are clear about their goals. So that you have a playing field where

lots of different things are going on in such a way that a lot of different tasks get done to advance women.

**Sister:** Is there one specific goal you would like to achieve as far as your interaction with Namibian women?

**Meg:** My goals are several. Firstly, I will say as often as I can that I believe the future of women lies in working together. There is no other way and I know that women's organisations sometimes get to points where they feel it would be better not to work together or they have disagreements about things and feel that that is reason enough not to work together anymore.

My second goal is to encourage all women to use their voices. The women I have met all over Africa have a wonderful sense of what their countries need. Not just what women need, but what their countries need, their children need, their governments need.

But women need to become more aware about the skills that it takes to have our voices heard; how to perform in front of a large audience, how to use a microphone, how to monitor a meeting. Because women can run countries. They can run them well, maybe even better ... but we have to know how to perform in the places where authority is used for the good of a country.