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GENDER AND POLITICS IN NAMIBIA BEYOND THE NUMBERS



Alongside other forms of inequality, Namibia has had a long history of gender inequality, perpetuated by the impact of colonialism, (changing) traditions, Christianity, and apartheid¹. In addition to facing cultural discrimination, colonial and apartheid laws further discriminated against women, with civil and customary laws defining women as minors. Today, 23 years after Independence, women still lag behind in the full expression of their political, economic and social freedoms, despite the range of legislation that supports their equal footing with men. The 2011 UN Human Development Report also shows that Namibia has a long way to go in terms of improving its placing on the gender development index – “a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievements between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market.”²

Politically, Namibian women continue to be represented predominantly by men – be it in the traditional, local or regional councils and at national level in parliament. Socio-economically, they also remain largely dependent on men and are disproportionately affected by unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy, among other indicators³.

1 LaFont, S. & Hubbard, D. 2007. Unravelling Taboos: Gender and Sexuality in Namibia. Gender Research and Advocacy Project. Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), Namibia.

2 United Nations Human Development Report. 2011. The United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report includes a gender empowerment measure (GEM) which assesses whether women take an active part in economic and political life. It tracks the share of seats in parliament held by women; female senior officials and managers; and female professional and technical workers - and the gender disparity in earned income, reflecting economic independence. In 2009, Namibia ranked 43rd out of 109 countries in the GEM, with a value of 0.620.

3 UN Human Poverty Index (HPI)

Against this cultural and historical background, gender inequality remains pervasive in Namibia, with women often being stereotyped as having their place confined to the kitchen or household, including the care of children (and husbands) and being responsible for subsistence crop production. Men, on the other hand, continue to be regarded as the rightful decision-makers in all realms and the heads of households. These socially constructed roles have contributed to gender inequality in Namibia, including in the spheres of political governance and decision-making. In fact, the implications of this stereotyping in the governance context result in a preference for “male” characteristics at higher levels of office, with women political candidates often being portrayed as “insufficiently aggressive or less competent” in their political dealings, even where they have been successful⁴.

Since Independence, Namibia has made major strides in promoting women’s equality. Article 10 of the Namibian Constitution Article 10 of the Constitution stipulates that all persons shall be equal before the law and prohibits any discrimination on grounds of sex. Article 23 goes further in this regard, to make provision for affirmative action for women. In this regard, it states that:

In the enactment of legislation and the application of any policies and practices contemplated by Sub-Article (2) hereof, it shall be permissible to have regard to the fact that women in Namibia have traditionally suffered special discrimination and that they need to be encouraged and enabled to play a full, equal and effective role in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the nation.

In this vein, the Namibian government has repeatedly stated its support for women’s rights and representation and has enacted, signed and ratified a plethora of laws, conventions and protocols to this effect. Policies such as the National Gender Policy, the National Gender Plan of Action, and the ratification of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development are all testimony to Namibia’s theoretical commitment to equal and equitable women’s representation in leadership and governance, as well as in other social contexts. Practically, however, the country has a long way to go to reach the requirements and deadlines to which it has committed itself in the said legislation.

The importance of equal and/or fair representation of women in parliament for democracy-building cannot be understated. In fact, in highlighting this importance, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) notes that “the development of any political agenda that does not include the perspectives, views and experiences of those who will be affected is not credible.”⁵ The Institute further posits

that the inclusion of women in governance is a key element of any democracy as “the essential tenet of any democratic framework is the principal of human rights, including the granting and exercise of the political rights of both men and women.”⁶

This paper explores Namibia’s record when it comes to gender and governance—particularly in terms of women’s representation in parliament, and goes beyond the numbers to explore the legislative environment, the challenges that women face in politics, the status and purpose of parliamentary caucuses, how parties should contribute to bringing about gender equality in politics, and recommendations to ensure the gender balance.

Policy and Regulatory Environment

Given the numerous policies and protocols that the Namibian government has enacted, signed and/or ratified, it is clear that there is a theoretical commitment to increasing women’s representation in politics in Namibia. Alongside Namibia’s own national policies, the SADC protocol, which calls for 50 percent women’s representation by 2015, is perhaps one of the most pressing of these documents. Government – which ratified the Protocol in 2008 – has repeatedly stated its commitment to meeting the Protocol’s objectives. In fact, in his foreword to Namibia’s National Gender Plan of Action, President Hifikepunye Pohamba proudly notes that “Namibia is the first country to have adopted both a policy and action plan aligned to the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.”⁷ He further describes the Protocol as Namibia’s “sub-regional road map for achieving gender equality”, adding that “as a nation we must make sure this happens by aligning our planning to these targets.”⁸

The SADC Protocol essentially combines/incorporates a number of existing gender-related instruments to which its member states (including Namibia) are signatory. These include The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA); The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1997) and its Optional Protocol; and The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Table 1 presents a brief description of the major conventions, policies and protocols related to women’s representation in politics that Namibia has committed itself to, and is followed by short overviews of the stipulations of the National Gender Policy, the National Gender Plan of Action, and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, as they relate to gender and political governance in Namibia.

4 Huddy, L. & Terkildsen, N. 1993. The Consequences of Gender Stereotypes for Women Candidates at Different Levels and Types of Office. *Political Research Quarterly* September 1993 vol. 46 no. 3 503-525

5 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2005. *Women in Parliament: Beyond the Numbers*. International IDEA, Stockholm, Sweden.

6 Ibid.

7 Namibia National Gender Plan of Action, 2011.

8 Ibid.

Table 1: Overview of policies and regulations related to gender and politics

National policies linked to gender	Year signed/ratified	Major guiding Legislation/ Policy	Key Elements with respect to gender representation in politics and decision-making	International conventions/protocols related to gender, to which Namibia is signatory
Vision 2030 and the National Development Plans	2010	(Revised) National Gender Policy (2010-2020)	Increase women's participation at all levels of decision-making, and provide support for women in governance and decision-making positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SADC Declaration on Gender and Development and its Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women and Children • The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) • The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1997), and its Optional Protocol
Married Persons Equality Act (1996)				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) • The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) • The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003)
Combating of Domestic Violence Act (2003)	2011	National Gender Plan of Action	Capacity building, skills development, mentorship and confidence building for women in parliament and other areas of public sector; Representation in all spheres of public life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UN Convention against Transnational Crime, 2000 (UNTOC) and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, known as the Palermo Protocol
Traditional Authorities Act (1995)				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) • The International Conference on Population and Development (1994) • The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) • International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) • International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
Local Authorities Act (1992)	2008	SADC Protocol on Gender and Development	50% of decision-making positions in the public and private sectors, the cabinet, parliament, judiciary, all tribunals and commissions, including human rights bodies, civil society, traditional structures, trade unions, political parties and the media to be held by women by 2015	

The Namibia National Gender Policy (2010-2020)

The first National Gender Policy was developed and adopted in 1997 and was “aimed at closing the gaps which were created by past socio-economic, political and cultural inequalities which existed in the Namibian society.”⁹ The revised Policy also addresses shortcomings inherent in previous policies, including “inadequate knowledge of gender mainstreaming, a lack of skills regarding gender analysis and poor coordination between the stakeholders and the MGECW, as the lead Agency.”¹⁰

With the aim of ensuring “integration and mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the broad development framework”, in line with NDP3 and Vision 2030, the National Gender Policy aims to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of both women and men in the socio-economic, cultural and political development of Namibia¹¹. The Policy addresses gender issues in terms of Poverty and Rural Development; Education and Training; Health, Reproductive Health and HIV and AIDS; Gender-Based Violence; Trade and Economic Empowerment; Governance and Decision-Making; Media, Research, Information and Communication; the Environment; the Girl-Child; Legal Affairs and Human Rights; Peace-Building, Conflict Resolution, and Natural Disasters Management; and Gender Equality in the Family.

⁹ Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, 2010. National Gender Plan (2010-2020). Republic of Namibia.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

With respect to women's representation in governance and political decision-making, the Policy states that its major objective is to, "Increase women's participation at all levels of decision-making, and provide support for women in governance and decision-making positions". In this respect, the Policy supports the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development's recommendation for 50 percent female representation in all SADC member States by 2015.

Further, it outlines twelve strategies for bringing about equal gender representation. These strategies are outlined in Exhibit 1 below:

Exhibit 1: Strategies for strengthening gender equality in governance

1. Encourage the participation of rural women in decision-making roles at local, regional and national levels by helping them overcome cultural, educational, and geographic barriers.
2. Facilitate an enabling environment for women in decision-making positions by engaging them in gender-sensitisation and by providing skills-training, mentoring and opportunities for women to play an active and vocal role in important decisions.
3. Create platforms for building women's and girls' self-esteem, empowerment and assertiveness.
4. Eliminate cultural practices which perpetuate gender inequality in power and decision making at all levels. Women and men must encourage this change in cultural perceptions, and women in decision-making positions must be supported.
5. Educate women on issues affecting their lives to ensure they have the information necessary to make informed decisions and to participate effectively in governance and decision-making processes.
6. Encourage and facilitate participation of women in traditional leadership structures.
7. Strengthen the Parliamentary Gender Structure(s) to educate and empower female Parliamentarians across political Party lines, and provide training for women Parliamentarians on subjects such as budgeting, speech-writing, public speaking, interviews with the media and lobbying and advocacy skills.
8. Encourage women's participation in political party structures and ensure that political Parties institute a 50/50 zebra system when preparing Party lists.
9. Educate women on the importance of voting and encourage their participation in election processes.
10. Ensure that women participate in decision-making on all forums concerned with democracy, security and peace-making activities, at all levels.

11. Promote women's recruitment for decision-making positions in government, the private sector and civil society.
12. Design and make available, in collaboration with other stakeholders, leadership development - and empowerment programmes for women of all ages.

Source: National Gender Policy (2010-2020)

The Policy also provides a number of recommendations with regards to creating an institutional framework to facilitate the realisation of the various policy objectives. These include the identification of the MGECW as the lead agency responsible for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the Gender Policy; the establishment of a National Permanent Gender Task Force at a regional and national level to oversee implementation, and to serve as an advisory and consultative body; the creation of a Parliamentary Gender Caucus to enhance communication between the Parliament and other stakeholders; the use of gender focal points for decision making and supervisory support in implementing the National Gender Policy in all government departments; and collaboration with development partners.

The Namibia National Gender Plan of Action

As an accompaniment to the National Gender Policy, the Action Plan essentially outlines the strategies, deliverable outputs, key performance indicators, baseline targets, the institution responsible for the actions to be carried out, the time frame, and existing cost budgets or additional funding available.

In creating the Action Plan, the MGECW used the Action Planning Framework developed by the Office of the Prime Minister and "referred to the ten priorities in the National Gender Policy; the ten areas of the SADC Gender Protocol, and the six key areas of focus of the newly consolidated UN Women"¹². In this regard, the Action plan specifies the priority areas under these three documents along seven clusters namely:

1. Gender and Human Rights, Health, HIV and AIDS
2. Gender, Health, HIV and AIDS
3. Gender, Education and the Girl Child
4. Poverty, Rural and Economic Development
5. Governance, Peace and Security
6. Media, Research, Information and Communication
7. Gender Management System

The Action Plan also specifies which ministries or state agencies

¹² National Gender Action Plan, 2011. Preface by Minister Doreen Sioka.

will be responsible for seeing through the stated targets, and identifies a number of stakeholders and partners to assist in this regard. Under the cluster dealing with Governance, the key priority actions highlighted in the Action Plan are¹³:

1. Capacity building, skills development and mentorship programmes for women to build and increase confidence levels;
2. Capacity building, skills development and mentorship targeted at women parliamentarians and women in peace keeping missions;
3. Representation of women in all spheres of public life: management, political parties and Traditional Authorities.

The strategies and key performance indicators under the governance cluster are stated as shown in Table 2 below:

SADC Protocol on Gender and Development

The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development recommitSADC member countries – Angola, Botswana, Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe – to achieving a number of objectives set out in various regional and global instruments and ensuring the implementation of the objectives stated within these instruments in an all-encompassing way. By setting 28 gender and development-related targets, the Protocol sets the pace for its member states in meeting their obligations to these instruments by 2015.

Table 2: National Gender Action Plan strategies, KPIs, Targets and time frames for gender, governance and decision making

	Strategies	Key Performance Indicators	Targets	Time frame
Political Decision-Making	Raising awareness of women to participate and claim their rights in society. Encourage women's participation in political party structures and mandate by that political parties institutes a 50/50 zebra system when preparing party lists.	Number of women in politics, decision making and managerial positions (Government, NGOs, private, parastatal and traditional authority)	50 percent of decision-making positions in all public and private sectors are held by women including through the use of affirmative action measures.	2012-2014
	Mainstream gender into the manifestos of political parties.	Extent to which political party manifestos mainstream gender	By 2014 all manifestos of political parties manifestos engendered	2012-2014
Public Management	Ensure representation of women in regional and local decision-making bodies.	Percentage increase of women in the proportion of women in management positions in the regional councils and local authorities and parliament	50% representation of women in management positions by 2015	2012-2014
	Ensure women's representation at all levels of decision-making in the Public Service.	Increase in the proportion of women in senior management cadre in the Public Service.	50% representation of women all levels of management positions by 2015	2012-2014
Women in senior positions in parastatals	Ensure representation of women at all levels of decision making in parastatals.	Increase in the proportion of women in senior positions in parastatals.	Gender parity by 2015	2012-2014

Source: National Gender Plan of Action

¹³ Ibid.

With respect to governance, the Protocol calls for “50 percent of decision-making positions in the public and private sectors, the cabinet, parliament, judiciary, all tribunals and commissions, including human rights bodies, civil society, traditional structures, trade unions, political parties and the media are held by women, and shall monitor their quotas to ensure that representation”¹⁴ by 2015. Further, it urges Member states to make Constitutional and legislative provisions to ensure compliance (including within electoral systems and at the party level), and calls for these measures to be accompanied by public awareness campaigns that “demonstrate the vital link between the equal representation and participation of women in decision making positions, and democracy, good governance and citizen participation.”¹⁵

Summarising the purpose and objectives of the Protocol, the SADC Gender Protocol Alliance states that the Protocol:

- encompasses commitments made in all regional, global and continental instruments for achieving gender equality
- enhances these instruments by addressing gaps and setting specific measurable targets where these do not

already exist

- advances gender equality by ensuring accountability by all SADC member states, as well as providing a forum for the sharing of best practices, peer support and review.

Namibia ratified the Protocol in 2008, thereby binding itself to the commitments enshrined therein.

Policies in the Works?

While all the above-stated policies and regulations created or signed by the Namibian government are remarkable, they mean little without the requisite action to realise their objectives.

In its submission for the review of the Electoral Law in 2012, the IPPR noted that with respect to gender balance, the quota system at the local authority level provided an important example of how a more balanced political landscape could be achieved. The Institute recommended that “for the party list system in

Exhibit 2: Recommendations regarding Gender Representation for Electoral Law Reform from the Law Reform and Development Commission.

In the context of the deliberations on the reform and revision of the Electoral Act, gender equity should be pursued in all positions relating to electoral tasks, from the lowest to the highest level, whether a temporary appointment or permanent, whether as commissioners (Electoral Commission, Delimitation Commission), members of a selection committee or as officials or political representatives at local, regional and national level, whether elected or nominated.

The Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development should be tasked with considering the proposals of the 50/50 Bill related to Regional Government, National Council and Local Authority representation. Such consideration is outside the scope of the Electoral Act.

The 50/50 Bill commissioned by the Namibian Manifesto Network and compiled by the Legal Assistance Centre should be considered for possible implementation when it relates to particular issues as contained in the Electoral Act. The aim of the bill is to provide for gender balance in the National Assembly, National Council, Regional Councils, and Local Authority Councils. Also recommended is that all future local authority elections should continue to be held on a party (organisation, association) list system (proportional electoral system) with provision for gender-balanced lists. Should the proposals be agreed to, fully or partially, such proposals would cause amendments to the Regional Council Act, the Local Authority Act, the Electoral Act and possibly also to the Constitution.

The ‘zebra’ method of nomination when candidates are nominated for elections at national and local level should be legalised. If the first candidate on the list is a male person, then the next candidate should be a female person and vice versa.

The general comment during the consultative process was to abide by the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, article 12, which emphasises fair gender representation in all electoral bodies and the goal of achieving a 50/50 percent representation by the year 2015. There is thus general agreement on fair gender representation, but also at the same time that quality should be the first criterion in the selection of candidates for the National Assembly, Regional Councils and Local Authorities, even should the majority be women.

As long Namibia is a signatory to the international statutes dealing with gender representation and is bound by the terms of those instruments under Article 144 of the Namibian Constitution, political parties are compelled to fair gender representation as an obligation upon Namibia.

Source: Law Reform and Development Commission, Töttemeyer Report

¹⁴ SADC Protocol on Gender and Development

¹⁵ Ibid.

National Assembly elections, a 'zebra system' could be introduced in which female and male candidates are alternated on the list to ensure a 50:50 gender balance. For first-past-the-post regional elections, parties should be required to nominate a certain proportion of female candidates."

The Law Reform and Development Commission itself made numerous recommendations following national consultations on electoral issues conducted in early 2012.

One of these recommendations focused specifically on gender representation (see Exhibit 2) and called for increased gender equity "in all positions relating to electoral tasks"; consideration by the MLGHRD of the "50/50 Bill related to Regional Government, National Council and Local Authority representation" – which it noted falls outside the scope of the Electoral Act; and – as per the IPPR submission – the use of the "zebra" method in the nomination of candidates for election at the national and local level.

In an interview with the IPPR, the Minister of Gender Equity and Child Welfare Minister, Rosalia Nghidinwa, said that she was confident that Namibia was prepared to meet the SADC 2015 deadline "despite the challenges along the road".

She added that her Ministry was preparing a submission to Cabinet for open discussion, and was further consulting with other line Ministries such as the Ministry of Regional Government, Local Development and Housing (which oversees local and regional governance), to ensure alignment with the Protocol, the National Gender Plan of Action, and other legislation that called for equal representation.

WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY: NAMIBIA'S GENDER RECORD

Despite a national gender distribution of 51 percent females and 49 percent males¹⁶, two years to the 2015 SADC Protocol deadline¹⁷, and policies that set an example for other countries in the region and the world at large, Namibia still has not surpassed the 30 percent mark at the National Assembly or at the National Council levels (see Tables 1 and 2).

In fact, it has been disconcerting that Namibia has slipped in its representation of women, with several media reports over the past couple of years expressing concern about these declining numbers. Currently, only 22 percent of voting MPs in the National Assembly are women – down from 30 percent in the 3rd and 4th National Assemblies. In the National Council, only 7 of the 26

(i.e. 27 percent) members are female; and in Cabinet, only 5 of the 26 (19 percent) members are female.

In 2011, The Namibian quoted former Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare Doreen Sioka as noting that "Our country started off well, but its women's representation in parliament has gone down to 20 percent." Despite this regression, Sioka remained hopeful, stating that "I am optimistic we can still reach the 50 percent women's representation goal in parliament and other public institutions come 2015".¹⁸

The table below highlights the percentage of women at the various levels of public office in Namibia.

Table 3: Women Office Holders in Namibia

OFFICE	Members/ Councillors	Number of Women	Percentage of women
Cabinet	26	5	19%
National Assembly MPs	78	19	24%
National Council MPs	26	7	27%
Regional Council	107	13	12%
Regional Governors	13	3	23%
Local Authority	323	135	42%
Mayors	30	8	27%

Source: Gender Links, 2011

National Assembly

While Namibia demonstrated impressive growth in the composition of women from the first to the third National Assemblies, the number of women has since declined from 28 percent in 2000-2005, to 22 percent currently. Of the 78 members in the National Assembly, only 19 are female. Further, of the six members appointed by the President in the last election, only one was a female.

The table on the following page provides an overview of the gender breakdown in each National Assembly over the years. These figures are inclusive of the six non-voting members chosen by the President, and illustrate the numbers/percentages of men and women at the start of each new parliament (i.e. they do not reflect changes within each five-year period).

¹⁶ National Planning Commission. 2011. Namibia 2011 Housing and Population Census – Preliminary Results.

¹⁷ SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. 2008.

¹⁸ Weidlich, B. 2011. *The Namibian*. Number of women in government declining. 04.01.2011. Retrieved from <http://www.namibian.com.na/news-articles/national/full-story/archive/2011/january/article/numbers-of-women-in-government-declining/> on 21.02.2013.

Table 4: Number of Women in the National Assembly over the Years, from the various parties

Year	Party	Total # Seats	# Men	# Women	% Women in Parliament
1 st National Assembly 1990-1995	Swapo	41 + 6	43	4	6.4%
	DTA	21	20	1	
	UDF	4	4	0	
	ACN	3	3	0	
	NNF	1	1	0	
	FCN	1	1	0	
	TOTAL	78	73	5	
2 nd National Assembly 1995-2000	Swapo	53 + 6	47	12	17.9%
	DTA	15	13	2	
	UDF	2	2	0	
	DCN	1	1	0	
	MAG	1	1	0	
	TOTAL	78	64	14	
3 rd National Assembly 2000-2005	Swapo	55 + 6	45	16	28.2%
	DTA	7	5	2	
	COD	7	4	3	
	UDF	2	1	1	
	MAG	1	1	0	
	TOTAL	78	56	22	
4 th National Assembly 2005-2010	Swapo	55 + 6	43	18	26.9%
	DTA	4	4	0	
	COD	5	3	2	
	UDF	3	2	1	
	NUDO	3	3	0	
	MAG	1	1	0	
	RP	1	1	0	
	TOTAL	78	57	21	
5 th National Assembly 2010-2015	Swapo	54 + 6	42	18	24.4%
	RDP	8	7	1	
	DTA	2	2	0	
	COD	1	1	0	
	UDF	2	2	0	
	NUDO	2	2	0	
	RP	1	1	0	
	APP	1	1	0	
	Swanu	1	1	0	
	TOTAL	78	59	19	

Source: National Institute for Democracy, 2005, & Gender Links, 2011

National Council

Women's representation in the National Council has remained stagnant since 2004, with a mere seven female members out of a total of 26 (i.e. 26.9 percent). This is a vast improvement from the one female representative in the 1992-1998 NC, but shows that there is still some way to go in ensuring more equal gender representation in the National Council.

The election of members from the Regional Councils to the National Council is prescribed by the Regional Councils Act, which falls under the scope of the Ministry of Regional and Local Government, Housing and Rural Development. This Act currently makes no mention of gender representation in the Regional and National Councils and does not establish quotas, guidelines, or preferences with regards to ensuring gender balance in these councils. It is important to note that the proportion of women in the National Council (26.9 percent) is higher than that of women in Regional Councils as a whole (12 percent), serving as an indication that the women that serve in this capacity have proven their leadership capabilities in ensuring their election to the National Council.

The table to the right provides an overview of the gender breakdown in each National Council over the years since independence.

Regional Councils

The Regional Councils Act makes no reference to the gender composition of the 13 councils, and only 12 percent of the total 107 Regional Councillors are women. The first-past-the-post (FPTP) system used for the selection of councillors to this office does not make this process any easier for engendering the Councils. This FPTP system is a form of plurality voting used mainly in single member legislative districts or constituencies where the candidate with more votes than any other(s) wins the election. In terms of election to Regional Councils, the "the act stipulates that a candidate must qualify to be a member under the terms of section 6 of the 1992 Regional Councils Act; be nominated as a member of a party by that party; or be nominated as an independent candidate and be supported by at least 100 registered voters in the constituency in which the nomination is sought."

Table 5: Number of Women in the National Assembly over the Years, from the various parties

Year	Party	Total # Seats	# Men	# Women	% Women in Parliament
1st National Council 1992-1998	Swapo	18	17	1	3.8%
	DTA	8	8	0	
	TOTAL	26	25	1	
2nd National Council 1998-2004	Swapo	24	22	2	7.6%
	DTA	1	1	0	
	UDF	1	1	0	
	TOTAL	26	24	2	
3rd National Council 2004-2010	Swapo	24	18	6	26.9%
	DTA	1	1	0	
	UDF	1	0	1	
	TOTAL	26	19	7	
4th National Council 2010-2016	Swapo	24	17	7	26.9%
	DTA	1	1	0	
	UDF	1	1	0	
	TOTAL	26	19	7	

Researchers argue that the FPTP system "has generally led to a severe under representation of women in Southern Africa"¹⁹, despite efforts by certain parties (e.g. Swapo, CoD and Nudo) to institute voluntary quotas of 50 percent women's representation on their electoral lists. Lebeau and Dima (2005) note that "It proved to be more difficult to implement quotas in nominating candidates for the first-past-the-post elections Regional Council election than for the proportional representation local government elections; moreover, voters (including women) are less likely to vote for female candidates than male candidates in Namibia"²⁰. International IDEA also argues that this system is "less conducive to ensuring the representation of women"²¹. Evidence in Namibia shows that women fare better in proportional representation (PR) election systems (such as the National Assembly and the Local Authority elections), than they do in FPTP systems (i.e. Regional Councils). The ACE Project also notes that "Evidence

¹⁹ Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA). 2009. Namibia: Women's Representation Quotas, December 2009. Accessed from <http://www.eisa.org.za/WEP/namquotas.htm> on 14 May 2013.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ International IDEA. 2006. Namibia: Country Report based on Research and Dialogue with Political Parties. EISA and International IDEA.

Exhibit 3: Pros and Cons of First Past The Post Systems

PROS

- It's simple to understand and thus doesn't cost much to administer and doesn't alienate people who can't count.
- It doesn't take very long to count all the votes and work out who's won, meaning results can be declared a handful of hours after polls close.
- The voter can clearly express a view on which party they think should form the next government.
- It tends to produce a two-party system which in turn tends to produce single-party governments, which don't have to rely on support from other parties to pass legislation.
- It encourages 'broad-church' centrist policies.

CONS

- Representatives can get elected on tiny amounts of public support as it does not matter by how much they win, only that they get more votes than other candidates.
- It encourages tactical voting, as voters vote not for the candidate they most prefer, but against the candidate they most dislike.
- FPTP in effect wastes huge numbers of votes, as votes cast in a constituency for losing candidates, or for the winning candidate above the level they need to win that seat, count for nothing.
- FPTP severely restricts voter choice. Parties are coalitions of many different viewpoints. If the preferred-party candidate in your constituency has views with which you don't agree, you don't have a means of saying so at the ballot box.
- Rather than allocating seats in line with actual support, FPTP rewards parties with 'lumpy' support, i.e. with just enough votes to win in each particular area. Thus, losing 4,000 votes in one area can be a good idea if it means you pick up 400 votes in another. With smaller parties, this works in favour of those with centralised support.
- With relatively small constituency sizes, the way boundaries are drawn can have important effects on the election result, which encourages attempts at gerrymandering.
- Small constituencies also lead to a proliferation of safe seats, where the same party is all but guaranteed re-election at each election. This not only in effect disenfranchises a region's voters, but it leads to these areas being ignored when it comes to framing policy.
- If large areas of the country are electoral deserts for a particular party, not only is the area ignored by that party, but also ambitious politicians from the area have to move away from their homeland if they want to have influence within their party.
- Because FPTP restricts a constituency's choice of candidates, representation of minorities and women suffers from 'most broadly acceptable candidate syndrome', where the 'safest' looking candidate is the most likely to be offered a chance to stand for election.
- Encouraging two-party politics can be an advantage, but in a multi-party culture, third parties with significant support can be greatly disadvantaged.

Source: Electoral Reform Society, 2013

across the world suggests that women are less likely to be elected to the legislature under plurality/majority systems than under PR ones"²². The implementation of Affirmative Action measures in a FPTP system is highly problematic, but not impossible. Parties with more than a certain number of candidates running for election could be required to submit the names to the ECN on the basis of a 50:50 gender split.

As noted in the preceding section on the National Council, despite a representation of only 12 percent in the Regional Councils, women make up 26.9 percent of MPs in the National Council, which is made up of two councillors from each region).

The appointment of Regional Governors by the President (as per the Special Advisors and Regional Governors Act which was amended in 2010 to allow for the appointment of Governors by the President) has not facilitated a more equitable representation of women as regional leaders either. Despite the President's constant calls and support for equal representation of women in governance, only three of the thirteen Regional Governors he appointed and swore in during 2011 were women – no change from the previous term of office wherein Regional Governors were selected from among the regional councillors.

²² ACE – The Electoral Knowledge Network. 2013. Advantages and Disadvantages of FPTP System. Accessed from <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/es/esd/esd01/esd01a/esd01a01> on 14 May 2013

Local Authorities

The country has performed much better at the local authority level due to the quota systems in place as per the Local Authorities Amendment Act²³, with current women's representation at just over 40 percent. Part 4 of Section 6 of the Amendment Act stipulates that:

For the purposes of any election contemplated in paragraph (a) of subsection (2), each party list shall contain as candidates for such election -

(a) in the case of a municipal council or town council consisting of 10 or fewer members or a village council, the names of at least three female persons;

(b) in the case of a municipal councillor town council consisting of 11 or more members, the names of at least five female persons.

The Act essentially attempts to ensure 42 percent women representation at the local government level. However, because men often appear at the top of party lists for any form of public leadership, this 42 percent is not always ensured. Indeed, achieving this quota itself did not come without resistance. In her autobiography, Libertina Amathila states that when the Bill came up for debate in parliament, "some male colleagues revealed how chauvinistic they were in reality. Whilst they were paying lip service to supporting the cause of women, the part of the Bill they were vehemently opposing was the quota system for women."²⁴

Outside of politics, Namibia still has a long way to go in bringing about equal gender representation in governance and decision-making roles at all levels in the private sector.

It is important to note that gender representation in politics and beyond is not just about the numbers. Women have a great deal to offer to decision-making processes, have shown themselves to be able and competent leaders, and bring a unique perspective to addressing national concerns. As such, a clearer understanding of why women are important in parliaments may help to curb some of the resistance they face from their male counterparts, who may be wary of being displaced from their positions in the process.

BEYOND THE NUMBERS: Why Women in Parliament?

Policymakers, researchers and others with interests in levelling the playing field in gender representation in politics often focus on the numbers. But the focus shouldn't merely be on quantity,

but also on the quality that women bring to the political landscape.

In an article on why women in politics matter, Marianne Mollmann of Human Rights Watch highlights two important reasons for equal gender representation. She states that "First, the more closely government represents the composition of society as a whole, the more stable its policies are likely to be. This means that it is not only important to include women, but also to ensure broad representation."²⁵ In the Namibian context, this essentially means that beyond equal gender representation, the political profile should be inclusive at a broader level – e.g. in terms of ethnicity, race, and so forth. Mollman goes on to state that the participation of women in a mixed-gender parliament is also important in ensuring dialogue that addresses the unique concerns of women. She adds that "of course, female politicians don't always bring up issues that are important

Empowering women and girls is central to promoting quick and equitable economic growth and long-term stability.

- UN 2012 MDG Africa Report

to women, and male politicians don't always exclude these concerns, but research has shown that non-feminist women are more likely than non-feminist male colleagues to work on policies that affect women."²⁶

The Inter-Parliamentary Union agrees with and expands on Mollman's views. During a session on the representation of women in parliament, politics and public life at the International Parliamentary Conference on Gender and Politics in November 2012, four important arguments for the equal representation of women were presented. According to the conference proceedings, these arguments were noted as follows²⁷:

- **Justice and fairness.** The exclusion of women from government had to be, in a democratic society, considered unjust. This fact made the 'justice' argument a powerful one. This argument could also problematise differences in social roles of men and women, for example child care provision.
- **Talent.** The second argument was that, by including women, the available talent pool would be expanded to the advantage of political party or employers.
- **Symbolism.** The third argument was that representation of women could be symbolic, adding to the legitimacy of and respect for an institution. This was important because government institutions must resemble society in order to avoid a democratic deficit. The 'role-model effect' resulting from women's symbolic representation held the disadvantage of potentially creating a feeling amongst women that they had

²³ Local Authorities Amendment Act (Act 3 of 1997)

²⁴ Amathila, L. 2012. Making a Difference. University of Namibia Press, Windhoek, 2012

²⁵ Mollman, M. 2011. Why Women in Politics Matter. Human Rights Watch, 2011. Accessed: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/06/24/why-women-politics-matter> on 15 February 2013

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ International Parliamentary Conference on Gender and Politics. Conference Proceedings: in November 2012

to act as role-models.

- **Substance.** The fourth argument was that women would make a difference in terms of the working environment and performance of an organisation. A problem with using the broad phrase ‘make a difference’ was that it was too nebulous. It could be argued that this argument should be presented as meaning that women might make a difference. It should not automatically be assumed that women would act in a certain way or as other woman might want them to. Women could bring different values and concerns to a workplace although not all institutions would necessarily welcome this.

But while the ‘substance’ argument may have its faults, global research has also shown that “the greater representation of women at the highest levels of governance has made a difference in raising awareness, changing agendas and providing a national gender-sensitive legal framework.”²⁸ This is an important point, because when discussing the dearth of women in politics and elsewhere, it is often assumed that capable women do not exist, and that they require more training, more attention, and more skill enhancement than their male counterparts. As equal players in parliament, however, while training and empowerment of women (and men) is indeed important in enhancing the effectiveness of Namibia’s politicians, recognising the unique contributions of women in parliament is also key.

Namibian politicians and members of civil society alike, agree with many of these sentiments, and in interviews with IPPR, all agreed that women bring a unique perspective and important talents when addressing issues of national concern. Emphasising the importance of women in politics, National Council MP and Deputy Chairperson Margaret Mensah-Williams (Swapo) told the IPPR that “women change the nature of arguments. They change the perspective. Women think with their hearts and naturally put children and men first. They look at a Bill with care for the nation as a whole, and not just their own interests.”

Selma Shilongo of the RDP agreed, stating that “women have an important role to play because they are more sympathetic to the suffering of their neighbours” and carry this sense of responsibility to their political roles and responsibilities too. She added that her own position as a mother, who wanted to see her children grow up in a “safe” and “happy” society where everybody can share in Namibia’s wealth, was what spurred her entry into politics.

Clara Gowases of the RP expanded on this notion, by adding that “women have the capacity to build the nation” because as women, they are concerned with “mothering the nation”, thereby bringing a “caring eye and emotion” to the political fray. She also noted that women were more sensitive to the assets of

government (thereby less likely to be corrupt). Adding a civil society voice to the mix, Veronica de Klerk of Women’s Action for Development (WAD) explained that “where women are leading at all levels, things are happening! Especially at the local level. Women are more emotional. They take issues to heart, and more readily take them on. Namibia is struggling with various issues at the moment, and it is important for women to be involved in addressing these social ills.”

Given these reasons, and the many other ways that women contribute to the political landscape – from raising politicians to serving as politicians – Ignatius Shixwameni of the APP noted categorically that the absence of women from politics would be a “disservice to the nation.” The IPPR adds that, “As yet, Namibia has not realised that women are indispensable in the political arena and bring tremendous value to parliamentary life and decision-making platforms.”²⁹

Balancing the Numbers: Quotas and Zebras

In order to balance the numbers, several countries have adopted quota systems within their governance bodies. These quotas aim at increasing the representation of women in governance by ensuring that women “constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body, whether it is a candidate list, a parliamentary assembly, a committee or a government.”³⁰

Successful quota systems lead to:

- the active recruitment of women by political parties in order to have a sufficient number of qualified candidates to fulfil the quota;
- a larger minority of women, rather than a token few, who will be able to influence political norms and culture; and
- women having the possibility to influence the decision-making process as individuals or with specific points of view and concerns.

International IDEA, 2005

According to a report by International IDEA, “Gender quotas draw legitimacy from the discourse of exclusion, according to which the main reasons for women’s under-representation are the exclusionary practices of the political parties and the political institutions at large. Quotas place the burden of candidate recruitment not on the individual woman, but on those who control the recruitment process, first and foremost the political parties. Quotas force those who nominate and select to start

28 International IDEA

29 Hopwood, G. & Tjirera, E. 2010. An Assessment of Parliamentary Records on Gender-related Issues. Institute for Public Policy Research. March 2010.

30 Dahlerup, D. 2005. Increasing Women’s Political Representation: New Trends in Gender Quotas. In Women in Parliament: Beyond the Numbers (p.141). International IDEA. 2005

recruiting women and give women a chance which they do not have today in most parts of the world.”³¹

Reactions to these quota systems have been mixed, but the major theme emanating from both sides of the argument is that while quotas may boost women’s representation in politics, on their own they are not enough to empower women on a global scale. Tackling the barriers that keep women on the fringes of politics – as opposed to simply shooing them into parliaments for window-dressing – is imperative to ensure the meaningful and active participation of women in governance, as well as to ensure that their male counterparts respect and value their contributions.

The Quota Project reports that while it is difficult to place an exact figure on how many countries are using quotas, “as of 2006, around 40 countries have introduced gender quotas in elections to national parliaments, either by means of constitutional amendment or by changing the electoral laws (legal quotas). In more than 50 countries major political parties

have voluntarily set out quota provisions in their own statutes (party quotas).”³²

Table 4 below highlights the pros and cons of the use of quota systems.

In Namibia, the only quota systems in place are at the local authority level, where the Local Authorities Amendment Act prescribes that “where there are 12 councillors, at least 5 should be women, and where there are 7 councillors, 3 should be women”, thereby ensuring at least 42 percent women representation at the local government level. At the political party level, the introduction of quotas is currently only voluntary, but for the representation of women to change on a national scale in order to achieve the SADC 2015 deadline, electoral law reform introducing these quotas would be necessary.

In a 2012 assessment on the progress made by African countries in line with the Millennium Development Goals, the African Union Commission, United Nations Economic Commission for

Exhibit 4: Pros and Cons of Quota Systems (International IDEA)

PROS

- Quotas for women do not discriminate, but compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of the political seats.
- Quotas imply that there are several women together in a committee or assembly, thus minimizing the stress often experienced by the token women.
- Women have the right as citizens to equal representation.
- Women’s experience is needed in political life.
- Men cannot represent the interest of women. Only many women can represent the diversity of women.
- Election is about representation, not educational qualifications.
- Women are just as qualified as men, but women’s qualifications are downgraded and minimized in a male-dominated political system.
- Quotas do not discriminate against individual men. Rather quota rules limit the tendency of political parties to nominate only men. For the voters, the opportunities are expanded, since it now becomes possible to vote for women candidates.
- Conflicts that may be caused by the introduction of quotas are only temporary.
- Several internationally recognized conventions on gender equality have set targets for women’s political representation, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which 179 countries are now party to, as well as the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action.
- How can it be justified that men occupy more than 80 percent of the parliamentary seats in the world?
- Quotas can contribute to a process of democratisation by making the nomination process more transparent and formalised.

CONS

- Quotas are against the principle of equal opportunity for all, since women are given preference.
- Political representation should be a choice between ideas and party platforms, not between social categories.
- Quotas are undemocratic, because voters should be able to decide who is elected.
- Quotas imply that politicians are elected because of their gender, not because of their qualifications, and that better-qualified candidates are pushed aside.
- Many women do not want to get elected just because they are women.
- Introducing quotas creates significant conflicts within the party organization.
- Quotas for women will be followed by demands for quotas for other groups, which will result in a politics of sheer group-interest representation.

Source: International IDEA and QuotaProject.com

³¹ Ibid.

³² The Quota Project. 2013. Global Database of Quotas for Women. Retrieved from <http://www.quotaproject.org/faq.cfm> on 6 March 2013.

Africa, African Development Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme–Regional Bureau for Africa (UNDP–RBA) write that³³:

Deliberate efforts at enhancing the status of women through involving and committing the top political class are vital. Beyond allocating resources - financial and social capital – explicitly passing and enforcing laws are pivotal steps. Indeed, affirmative actions and explicit constitutional provisions for dealing with gender-based discrimination have advanced women’s positions in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda. But such actions are a means to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment, not an end. To link gender equality to sustained development, Africa should go beyond participation to “capacitation”.

These sentiments are important in addressing the full value of quota systems and affirmative action in the promotion of women to political participation. The four organisations note that essentially, “efforts are needed to break the socio-cultural impediments that hinder women’s political participation through training and advocacy on how women can enhance their leadership role and contribute fully to public debate and policy decisions.”³⁴

FINDING THE NUMBERS: Where are the Women?

As noted in the previous section, numerous studies have shown that “when women run for office, they perform just as well as their male counterparts”³⁵. In Namibia, this notion has been emphasised time and again through the exemplary performance of several female political leaders at all levels of governance – whether as mayors, councillors, Regional Governors, or Cabinet Ministers.

Lawless and Fox (2012) argue that the reason for the gender gap that continues to exist in legislative systems worldwide, is because women do not run for office. Noting the imbalance in political ambition, they state that “Women are not only less likely than men to consider a candidacy – both retrospectively and prospectively – but they are also less likely than men to take any of the steps required to launch an actual political campaign.”³⁶ They go on to list seven factors that hinder gender parity in politics in general, but more specifically in elective office. Among

others, they highlight the perception amongst women that the electoral environment as highly competitive and biased against female candidates; the perception that they are not qualified to run for office; the idea that “female potential candidates are less competitive, less confident, and more risk averse than their male counterparts”; and the notion that “women react more negatively than men to many aspects of modern campaigns”.³⁷

Veronica de Klerk of Women’s Action for Development agrees that the dearth of women in politics is a result of their not running for office. And she attributes their not running to “a lack of self-confidence and the lack of education regarding the steps that need to be taken in order to enter politics.”³⁸ In addition to this issue, which De Klerk describes as “the most profound problem”, women face a myriad of challenges in entering politics.

Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Rosalia Nghidinwa, cites the “double burden” that women face as a major inhibiting factor to increasing women’s representation in government – a role that requires constant engagement. She states that “women have double roles – as parliamentarian and as wife/mother. While we’re sitting in parliament, we have other responsibilities in the home, and this is often what makes women not to participate and to develop themselves further; while men go home, and everything is taken care of for them.” In an article for the EU-Asia Center that supports the use of quota systems, Ewert, too, highlights the ‘double burden’ factor, stating that “Women with children are at a disadvantage and are thus less likely to reach the highest positions. Additionally, the crucial age for climbing the career ladder coincides with the time when most women have children. A quota could help mitigate these conditions. In political careers, skills and popularity among the public are more likely to counterbalance the loss of professional experience while raising children.”³⁹

Shixwameni notes four challenges which he believes women face. He states that (1) “women see politics as a male-dominated area”, and therefore feel intimidated in challenging them in this arena; (2) the spouses of women who join politics often dissuade their wives from joining (opposition) political parties for fear of the repercussions (e.g. losing their job); (3) “women fear risking their lives and the wellness of their families due to politics-related violence”; and (4) “women nominate men” for election, instead of nominating other women. Other interviewees cite additional challenges such as the notion that “at times, men don’t take us seriously, and think that the place of women is only in the kitchen”; and the need for additional training and empowerment of women interested in politics, as well as for gender-sensitisation across the board.

33 African Union Commission, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, African Development Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme. 2012. MDG Report 2012: Assessing Progress in Africa toward the Millennium Development Goals – Emerging perspectives from Africa on the post-2015 development agenda.

34 Ibid.

35 Lawless, J. & Fox, R. 2012. Men Rule: The Continued Under-representation of women in US politics. Women and Politics Institute, Washington DC, January 2012.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 IPPR Interview, Veronica de Klerk, 18 February 2013

39 Ewert, J.M. 2013. Where are the Women? Females in politics and business in Europe and Asia. EU-Asia Center. Retrieved from http://www.eu-asiacentre.eu/pub_details.php?pub_id=82 on 22.02.2013.

The National Gender Policy also provides some insights into the challenges that Namibian women face in participating more actively in politics. It states that:

Challenges concerning gender equality in decision-making roles include factors such as cultural perceptions regarding the role of men compared to women in decision-making, uneven participation of women in electoral processes, low educational attainment in some regions, and a lack of women empowerment programmes. Namibia also faces challenges in ensuring meaningful and substantive participation of women in decision-making roles. Women must not only be present in positions of power, but their voices must be heard. Increasing the quantity, prominence and authority of women in decision-making positions will entail more adequate training in leadership skills from childhood as well as ongoing training and support for women leaders.

Some of the challenges noted above touch on the stereotypes that women in politics face, and the perceptions of how they are expected to act. Highlighting the findings of a Communication Studies report on gender stereotypes and the perception of male and female candidates, Potter writes that “Female politicians are subject to many more negative stereotypes than men — the common stereotypes include mother, pet, seductress and iron maiden, according to Communication Studies. Female politicians must tread carefully in constructing their public image, not wanting to appear to be either too feminine or too masculine.”⁴⁰ Interviewees agree that cultural expectations for women to be more passive - along with other traditional, religious and gender stereotyping factors – play a large role in women’s aversion from politics, and their tendency to leave decision-making (particularly at the higher levels of governance) to the men.

The following section discusses how the individual political parties either contribute to or take away from efforts to engender Namibia’s political landscape.

ADDING UP THE NUMBERS: Change starts at the Party Level

Exhibit 5: Excerpt on women in politics from Libertina Amathila’s autobiography, *Making a Difference*

The highest political office reached by a woman in Namibia, has been that of Deputy Prime Minister by Libertina Amathila. In her autobiography, *Making a Difference*, she provides a number of insights into her experience as a woman working in a male-dominated world. Below is a

telling excerpt on women in politics from her book:

“I know that blame for the lack of women representation is simplistically put at the door of women, namely that they don’t elect each other. The argument is instigated by men who don’t understand the serious problems women face; I know they will deny it but it’s true. To be elected, the parties demand we start from the sections to regional conferences and women don’t have the luxury of campaigning in villages. While their male counterparts are hanging out with their buddies in shebeens and bars, politicking, women have to start from the early hours to till the land, milk the cows, and prepare the children to go to school, feed the children and even those husbands, and do the household chores. Thus they are not attending the meetings at some of those village and regional levels. Some meetings also start at night and how would women in rural areas attend these meetings when they attend to their crops till late? Women work, starting at dawn and coming home at sunset. They come home late and cook for the children and their families, so they miss meetings, and it’s obvious that unless they attend meetings, nobody will know them.

Thus the challenge is daunting for women unless they are assisted to get on the political train. Even if she gets on the list, there is no guarantee that a woman will be elected. She is losing out, because these days, in order to keep a woman out, there’s a catchphrase: ‘We don’t know this woman, she doesn’t attend the meetings.’ In that way she is left out. But if it’s a man nobody asks who knows him. I want to encourage my party, Swapo, that a quota system be introduced so that women can be elected and play a meaningful role in the affairs of this country. We all know by now that the majority of women perform well when elected.”

Because this report focuses on the national representation of women in decision-making bodies, it is also important to assess how the country’s leading parties perform with respect to gender, as it is from their ranks that women in governance are selected.

The Congress of Democrats (CoD) is notably the most progressive party in parliament in terms of gender equality, as it makes use of the ‘zebra system’ that ensures 50/50 gender representation on an alternating scale. The National Democratic Party of Namibia also makes use of a zebra list, but this party failed to secure any seats in the 2009 elections. However, while this is clearly an important way to ensuring equal representation in the National Assembly, the impact of this system cannot be fully felt with only the CoD’s implementation, as the party has only managed to win 7, 5, and 1 seat(s) to the last three assemblies respectively. It’s contribution of women to the 3rd (3 women) and 4th (2 women) National Assemblies was important, relatively speaking, but with only one candidate in the 5th National Assembly, and seemingly waning popularity since it came to the fore in 1999, the party’s future – and its hope for raising the bar with regards to gender equality – remains bleak.

⁴⁰ Potter, H. 2012. Opinion: Where are all the women in politics? USA Today. Retrieved from <http://www.usatodayeducate.com/staging/index.php/opinion/opinion-where-are-all-the-women-in-politics> on 22.02.2013.

Importantly, however, the CoD can be proud of the candidate it had in Nora Schimming-Chase, before her highly publicised departure from the party's ranks. According to an assessment of Hansard publications, during the 2000-2005 National Assembly, Schimming-Chase was the only female MP amongst the top ten MPs "in terms of the level of contributions to general debates"; and along with Elma Dienda (also of the CoD) leading the pack, was amongst the top ten female MPs in terms of lines in Hansard with a gender reference⁴¹.

The 'ruling party' has had the most potential to equalise the gender structure of parliament, given the party's sheer size and scope within the National Assembly. It is important to note Swapo has contributed the largest number of women to the overall National Assembly list. Of the 20 women in parliament at the moment, 19 (98 percent) are from Swapo, and the party has held the greatest proportion of females in parliament since independence. However, in all, the percentage of MPs representing Swapo who are female, has always lingered between 8.5 percent (1990-1995) and 30.6 percent (2010-2015). As with the remaining parties, given the national goal to have 50 percent female representation by 2015, these numbers do little to advance the cause of women in governance.

Prior to Swapo's 5th Congress, gender equality featured strongly at the party's first and highly publicised National Policy Conference in September 2012. At the Congress two months later, there was much talk about bringing about 50/50 representation in the party's structures, but the actual discussion and implementation of this topic was postponed to an extraordinary congress set for June 2013, despite former President Sam Nujoma's urging that "the Swapo party government must implement the 2002 and 2007 Swapo party congress resolutions for equal representation of women in influential positions."⁴²

The extraordinary congress is slated for the 21st to 23rd June 2013, when it is expected that the party will make final decisions regarding proposed amendments to make changes to the party's constitution, in order to meet the ideal of 50/50 representation. According to newspaper reports on the planned congress, "In terms of the amendments, two of the top four positions of the ruling party, being the party president, vice president, secretary general and deputy secretary general, should be occupied by women and the composition of all Swapo structures must comply with 50/50 representation. This includes that 33 of the 66 Central Committee members should be women and that three of the six presidential appointees to the CC should be women. The party will also introduce an election system for its National Assembly candidate list whereby female

and male candidates are elected separately and the list is then finalised by using the 'zebra style'.⁴³

In terms of reaching the national 50/50 goal, it is essentially the Swapo party that is best positioned to bring about the change that the Government (often referred to as "the ruling party government" by Swapo itself) wishes to see. For example, if Swapo had a 50 percent women representation in its current structure, all things equal, the proportion of women in parliament today would be 38.5 percent – a major shift from the current 24 percent.

Beyond Swapo and the CoD, the remaining parties have failed to contribute much to gender equality in the National Assembly. The Rally for Democracy and Progress, which won eight seats in the last election, only has one female MP in the 2010-15 National Assembly, and further, has only 15 women (20.8 percent) in its 72-member Central Committee and four women (19 percent) in its 21-member National Executive Committee. This is despite the party Manifesto's declaration, under the subheading "women's empowerment", to "strive to achieve at least 50 percent representation of women, both in government and public service, as well as within our own Party's political and organizational activities."⁴⁴ In an interview with IPPR, RDP's Selma Shilongo noted that the party recently held a workshop to discuss alternative policies with regards to women's representation in the party's structures, and stated that the party is considering amending its constitution to reflect a commitment to 50/50 representation, possibly using the zebra system or an alternative method.

The DTA, UDF and NUDO each won two seats in the 2010-2015 National Assembly, but none of them fielded a woman to parliament. The DTA's Manifesto states the party's commitment to the "complete recognition" of women "in all spheres of society" and promises to "actively pursue equal rights for women before the law"⁴⁵, but does not make any statement with regards to gender balance in its ranks. Just before the 2009 Elections, however, the party had four women in its top 10 spots (40 percent), and 30 women in its list of 72 (42 percent). Three of the four positions held by women in the Top 10 were at numbers 8, 9 and 10. In an interview with IPPR, the DTA's Secretary General McHenry Venaani expressed the need to ensure that women feature in key leadership positions within party structures. He stated that "(In) the four top positions of the party, you need strong women representation and not just lip service. There is a definite need to see more women in the National Executive – the top jobs of the party, using a zebra listing".

41 Hopwood, G. and Tjirera, E., 2010. An Assessment of Parliamentary Records on Gender-related Issues. Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR).

42 Ndimbira, D. 2012. It's here: SWAPO Congress opens. Windhoek Observer, 29 November 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.observer.com.na/8-latest-news/654-it-s-here-swapo-congress-opens> on 3 March 2013.

43 Immanuel, S. 2013. Swapo extraordinary congress set for June. *The Namibian*, 20 February 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.namibian.com.na/news/full-story/archive/2013/february/article/swapo-extraordinary-congress-set-for-june/> on 3 March 2013.

44 Rally for Democracy and Progress. 2009. RDP 2009 Election Manifesto.

45 DTA Manifesto

The UDF's Manifesto promises the creation of a "National Women's Council to develop and monitor women empowerment programmes"⁴⁶, and states that it will ensure 50 percent women's representation in politics, as well as 40 percent women's representation in parastatals by 2015, using affirmative action measures. In 2009, 40 percent of UDF's top 10 positions on the party list were occupied by women, with 51 percent women making up the party's list of 72. However, the party does not make use of a zebra system, and the two representatives in the National Assembly are both men.

Finally, NUDO's 2009 Election Manifesto promises the party's commitment "to revitalising women roles in social, economic, cultural and political arenas." It goes on to promise the implementation of "a quota system to ensure a fair representation of women at both local and national level...through the transformation of the electoral system."⁴⁷

COD (discussed above), RP, APP and SWANU each won only one seat in the 2010-2015 National Assembly, and each fielded a man to these seats.

Following the resignation of the party's president, Henk Mudge, from parliament, Clara Gowases – a woman – filled the RP's vacancy in the National Assembly⁴⁸. The RP's Manifesto makes no mention of gender issues or women's representation in politics. However, in an IPPR interview with Gowases, the MP noted the party's seriousness with ensuring 50/50 representation. She noted that she does not believe in the zebra list because this could interfere with the 'democratic' election of party members to major roles within the party. During the 2009 Election, 40 percent of the party's top ten spots were occupied by women, and 50 percent of those in the list of 72 were women.

Under the title "Gender Equality at all levels", the APP's 2009 Manifesto states that the party supports "total gender equality", noting that "50/50 in decision making structures must become a reality in our lifetime"⁴⁹. It notes that the party will ensure that "for any minister that is of a sex the deputy shall be of another sex", adding that this will be applied at all levels of public governance. In an interview with IPPR, APP president, Ignatius Shixwameni said that his party had made its commitment to 50/50 representation clear, and that this commitment would be reflected in the party's Manifesto and Constitution. When pressed for the party's position on the zebra-method, he noted that the APP is "trying to have a zebra list for parliament" but added that "how we do this will be challenging, because of the

element of trying to remain democratic." He said that the party was exploring modalities in this regard, and expressed his hope that at least the top 20 in the party would have a zebra style application. In 2009, only 2 of the top 10 spots in the APP were held by women.

SWANU of Namibia makes no mention of gender representation in governance in its 2009 Election Manifesto⁵⁰. In the 2009 Election 30 percent of its top 10 spots were held by women, while the list of 72 had 42 percent women representation.

Among the parties that did not win any seats in the 2009 elections, gender representation within their lists of 72 and on the top 10 spots have been mixed, as shown in the table below.

The Communist Party was the only party with more women than men on both the party list and the top 10 spots⁵¹.

Table 6: Gender representation during the 2009 elections for parties that did not win any seats in the National Assembly

Party	Percentage Women in Top 10	Percentage Women on party list of 72
Communist Party	60	65
Democratic Party of Namibia	50	38
Monitor Action Group	0	32
Namibia Democratic Movement for Change	10	16
National Democratic Party of Namibia	50	50

Proponents of equal women's representation agree that in order to ensure that political parties come to the party in realising 50/50 representation, reforms to the electoral act need to be made, that stipulate specific quotas and regulations in bringing about the necessary change. Beyond this reform, however, the promotion of women's participation in politics and the sensitization of Members of Parliament to gender mainstreaming are equally important.

POWER IN NUMBERS: The Role of Women's Caucuses

The primary purpose of women's caucuses worldwide is to bring women in governance together, across party lines. International

46 Weidlich, B. 2009. Party Manifestos: Gender Issues. *The Namibian*. 30.10.2009. Retrieved from <http://www.namibian.com.na/news-articles/national/full-story/archive/2009/october/article/party-manifestos-gender-issues/> on 23.02.2013.

47 National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO). 2009. 2009 Election Manifesto.

48 Goeieman, F. 2011. Mudge throws in the towel. *Namibian Sun*, 17.03.2011.

49 All People's Party. 2009. For Fundamental Change and Just Wealth Redistribution: The Political and Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation Program and Manifesto of the All People's Party (APP).

50 SWANU of Namibia. 2009. 2009 Election Manifesto – Election Theme: SWANU Cares for the People. Statement by SWANU President Usutuaije Maamberua

51 IPPR. 2009. Gender: Are the parties serious? Election Watch Issue No. 7, 2009.

IDEA advocates the establishment of parliamentary women's caucuses, "arguing that women should organise both inside and outside political parties". The organisation notes that "The strength of newly-elected women legislators can lie in their solidarity and capacity to unite, beyond their party structures, to tackle specific gender issues."⁵²

The National Democratic Institute adds that caucuses are "able to extend influence over several realms simultaneously", and highlight the following key advantages of caucuses⁵³:

- They impact the government and political process by helping to shape the agenda and by providing information and advocacy
- They impact the constituency by raising awareness about an issue, by acting as catalyst for communication on certain issues between government and civil society, and by providing information and advocacy
- They act as a watchdog for certain issues by ensuring that concerned individuals and groups are aware when relevant legislation is up for review
- Members of caucuses often become the spokespeople for their issues, thereby streamlining information and raising awareness.

In Namibia, the Women's Parliamentary Caucus was established in 1996 as an initiative of the late Mose Tjitendero⁵⁴ with the aim of addressing common issues confronting women. All female parliamentarians automatically become members of the caucus, and the tasks of the caucus include disseminating information, discussing the status of women, examining policies, legislation and budgets in terms of gender equity, and advising Parliament on gender issues⁵⁵. Over the past few years, however, the WPC has been completely inactive, despite several calls to reignite the work that it does in contributing to the objectives to increase women's representation and participation in parliament.

The caucus's operations initially fell under the scope of the Standing Committee of Human Resources Social and Community Development. According to the Parliament's website, "during the year 2009, the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Standing Rules and Orders and Internal Arrangements approved the WPC to become a full standing Committee of Parliament, known as the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women and Gender." It was expected that this Committee would become operational during the fifth Parliament (2010-2015), but to date, it remains a pipedream.

In 2009, Veronica de Klerk of the Women's Action for Development shed additional light on the inactivity of the caucus, stating that "I am not convinced that the Women's

Parliamentary Caucus in Namibia, which cuts across party-political lines, is active and well-known enough."⁵⁶ She added that the caucus "should operate for the benefit of all women and it can be exploited by female politicians as a platform to source information on the plight of women, through the views and recommendations of NGO's; Community Based Organisations; Churches; youth movements, etc - in order to formulate sound proposals for Parliament." De Klerk further pointed to the responsibility of women in parliament, stating that, "Female politicians should closely guard against complacency, or getting too comfortable with the men, once they are in parliament, forgetting about the plight of other vulnerable women out there, who desperately need their assistance and who voted for their party."⁵⁷ During a recent interview with IPPR, De Klerk added that the implications of an inactive WPC would be that "women's issues will never be addressed as they should be," and pointed to critical problems currently baffling Namibian society, such as "the killing and rape of women, the dumping of babies, and the spate of 'passion killings'" among others.

In an interview with the IPPR, the Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare also noted the importance of the WPC, stating that "the MGECW would like the WPC to be active, so that it can be used to send a strong message on gender issues in Namibia." Mensah-Williams further noted that without a WPC, "bills will slip through without women's voices being heard," as the purpose of such a caucus should be to "influence laws, pressurize for action, and change or amend laws" taking the interests of women into consideration.

Representatives of the various parties interviewed for this paper also pointed to the potential of the WPC as a force to address women's issues in Namibia, given the cross-party nature of the caucus. Clara Gowases stated that activating the WPC "is a matter of urgency because it would increase media engagement with women and women's issues" and because currently "there is no platform for inter-party discourse on women's issues." Shixwameni added to this point by stating that the WPC was necessary "in the spirit of women standing together across party lines, and speaking as Namibians, not just as party women." He stressed that through a WPC, women would strengthen their voice as a united force and "men will listen".

Namibia's National Gender Policy, too, calls for a caucus that focuses its efforts on gender issues. As one of its recommendations for the institutional framework to facilitate its implementation, the Policy calls for the establishment of a Parliamentary Gender Caucus (PGC) to enhance communication between parliament and other stakeholders. Within this framework, it is envisaged that the PGC will:

- ensure sufficient support for women Parliamentarians and provide proper in-service training to allow them to be active

52 International IDEA, 2008. <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HD593.pdf>

53 National Democratic Institute, 2008

54 Interview with Margaret Mensah-Williams, 2013.

55 Parliament of Namibia. 2013. Retrieved from http://www.parliament.gov.na/womens_caucus.php on 24.02.2013.

56 De Klerk, V. 2009.

57 De Klerk, V. 2009.

- and engaged members of Parliament;
- sensitise both female and male Parliamentarians to gender-related issues;
 - monitor all matters pertaining to gender issues and ensure that all laws respect the equal rights of men and women, and address the special issues facing women in Namibia;
 - scrutinise national budgets to ensure their gender responsiveness in resource allocations;
 - commit adequate resources and support for implementation of gender-related activities;
 - create commensurate structures to ensure integration of gender activities and participation of women; and
 - provide support for upcoming women leaders and support women's empowerment programmes.

The only active parliamentary body dedicated to gender issues is the National Council's Standing Committee on Women, which has its own budget. Asked what the National Assembly's WPC could learn from this Committee, Vice Chairperson of the National Council and Chairperson of the NC Committee on Women, Margaret Mensah-Williams, noted that the Committee had "practical learning on the ground", and had much to share in this regard; and suggested that the WPC and this committee could jointly seek funds for the implementation of policies related to gender issues. For example, the committee held the first ever rural women's parliament session in September 2012, which brought together two women and a man from each of the country's 13 regions under the theme "Promoting Gender Equality in the Democratic Process from the Lens of Grassroots Women"⁵⁸, where issues such as "child-bearing, maternal and child death and violence and development issues" were discussed.

There have been other moves to carry out or complement the roles of a WPC. In June last year, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Namibia Branch was launched. According to a news article on the launch, the purpose of CWP is to "drive the advocacy of gender equality in law making decisions, based on all spheres of life, be it political, economic or cultural."⁵⁹ The four members of the Namibia Branch include Ruth Kepawa Nhinda (Chairperson), Sophia Swartz (Vice-Chairperson), Rosa Kunyanda Kavara (Member) and Alexia Manombe-Ncube (Member); and it is expected that their major tasks will include communicating and liaising with gender-focused ministerial (e.g. MGECW), parliamentary (e.g. Parliamentary Women's Caucus), and civil society organizations in Namibia.⁶⁰ The only media mention of the Branch, to date, has been reportage on its launch.

Various countries in the region and across the continent have experienced notable successes through the activities of Women's Caucuses. In Rwanda, the women's parliamentary forum has made important contributions to legislation and the monitoring of gender policies, strategies and budgets through their advocacy on gender-related issues. Malawi's women's caucus has worked on important legislation "relating to widows and inheritance, the custody and maintenance of children, citizenship, marriage and divorce". And in Uganda, the Women Parliamentarians Association "has been instrumental in including gender equality clauses in the Ugandan Constitution"⁶¹. International experience shows that women's caucuses present important avenues to bring gender issues to the fore in an all-encompassing way, and the power of numbers across parties in this regard, is significant.

Gender Sensitisation in Parliament

In mainstreaming gender in politics, it is also important to remain cognisant of the impediments that women face to their full participation and discourse on women's issues once they have arrived in political office.

A 2010 IPPR paper that assessed Parliamentary records on gender-related issues highlighted factors such as "inadequate oratory skills and limited knowledge of the English language", "the perception that politics is the exclusive domain of men" and cultural elements as barriers to women's participation⁶². It highlights a study conducted among various countries in Southern Africa, Namibia included, in which "women cited culture as the biggest barrier to their participation while men observed that confidence and socialisation was the biggest obstacle."⁶³ Additionally, loyalty to one's party first, which results in women rallying behind their male 'party comrades' on national issues, instead of dealing with the gender (or other) implications of that issue, often keeps women silent in parliament. In explaining this concept of political patronage, Hopwood and Tjirera write:

Namibia is not an exception when it comes to the patrimonial nature of politics. Patrimonial politics posits that decisions are taken not on the basis of institutionalised rules, but in favour of personal relationships and to personal advantage⁶⁴. Thus, women parliamentarians can also be caught in the 'reciprocity equation' which renders independent stances impossible. In a patrimonial system, all ruling relationships, both political and

58 Ikela, S. 2012. Grassroots Women's Parliament. *Namibian Sun*. 11.09.2012. Retrieved from: <http://sun.com.na/content/national-news/grassroots-women%E2%80%99s-parliament> on 24.02.2013.

59 Collins, D., 2012. Women Empowerment Launched in Parliament. *New Era*, 27 June 2012. Retrieved from: <http://www.newera.com.na/articles/45972/Women-empowerment-launched-in-Parliament> on 30 January 2013.

60 Collins, D., 2012.

61 Saeed, M. Across Party Lines: Women Parliamentary Caucus- Why it is such a good idea? United Nations Development Programme. *Development Discourse – Autumn Edition*, Issue No. 6. Retrieved from <http://www.undp.org.pk/sixthissue/more/Across%20Party%20Lines.pdf> on 19.02.2013.

62 Hopwood, G. & Tjirera, E. 2010. An Assessment of Parliamentary Records on Gender-related Issues. Institute for Public Policy Research, March 2010.

63 Morna & Tolmay (eds.) 2007: At the Coalface

64 Gero Erdmann (2002), Neo-Patrimonial Rule: Transition to Democracy has not Succeeded

administrative, are personal relationships. This could preclude women from genuinely taking a stand and vigorously advocating for gender equality because they feel they 'owe' their position to a senior male politician. However, this is not to say that women should be the only ones advocating for gender equality.

Indeed, while women are able to better articulate the needs, hopes and aspirations of their gender in a more fundamental way, raising issues related to gender should not be restricted to female politicians. Moving beyond the inhibiting aspects of political patronage and culture – in terms of raising gender issues in parliament and decision-making structures – requires gender sensitisation amongst both male and female politicians. This is especially important given the more recent spate of violent crimes against women and the issue of baby dumping.

Hansard records have shown that when it comes to gender, some male MPs have made comments or presented questions that, in terms of gender sensitivity, have been highly inappropriate. One example⁶⁵:

On April 19 2007 Elma Dienda raised the issue of police response to violence against women cases. She noted that when one reported domestic violence to the police, officers often said “no, we are not dealing with domestic violence issues, go back.” The latter prompted a male MP to ask Dienda the following: “Honourable Dienda, you were talking about women being harassed by men. It is true, it happens, but do you also know that there are men who are harassed by women and that they go crying to the same unit and they are sent back home?”⁶⁶ Looking closely at this question, a subtle indifference to domestic violence could be a conclusion. Being a valid question as it may, it is public knowledge that domestic violence in Namibia as elsewhere has a gender dimension with predominantly women as victims, and men fundamentally as perpetrators. In this view, such a question seems intended to obscure the bigger picture of the need to address domestic violence.

While several more examples of gender-insensitive comments can be found in the Hansards, records also show that men have been important players in raising gender issues in parliament, setting an example for many women – some of whom have remained entirely silent on the topic. During the 2005 and 2007 period, for example, McHenry Venaani, Nahas Angula, Jurie Viljoen, Peya Mushelenga and Henk Mudge topped the list of MPs (in that order) with Hansard lines with a gender reference on issues ranging from rape cases and baby dumping, to affirmative action, maternal and child healthcare, and the MGECW budget vote. They were followed by Elma Dienda, who

topped the list of female MPs with gender-related Hansard lines.

Qualitatively, promoting gender sensitisation in parliament would enhance the way in which gender issues are assessed in parliament, as well as the way media covers parliamentary issues related to gender.

Further, in mainstreaming gender in Parliament and other decision-making structures, it is important that both men and women understand the importance and the quality of the contributions that women can make. In this regard, the SADC Protocol notes in Article 12.2 that “States Parties shall ensure that all legislative and other measures are accompanied by public awareness campaigns which demonstrate the vital link between the equal representation and participation of women and men in decision making positions, democracy, good governance and citizen participation.”⁶⁷

It further notes in Article 13, that in ensuring equal participation, Member States should put in place policies, strategies and programmes to enhance gender mainstreaming and to change “discriminatory attitudes and norms of decision making structures and procedures.”⁶⁸ The Protocol adds that both men and women are included in gender-related activities to this end.

Beyond SADC, efforts at gender sensitisation are also well highlighted in the ECOWAS Parliament’s Gender strategy for 2010-2020, which highlights the development of a communication strategy as key to raising awareness and sensitisation on gender in parliaments. In this regard, the West African regional organisation notes that “a general understanding and acknowledgement of the importance of gender equity promotion is a start for all,” and that there is “gender sensitivity has to be built into both women and men, particularly in those who are in key positions of decision-making.”⁶⁹ Namibia can learn from this and other international strategies and best practices in terms of sensitization in parliament, and women’s organisations also have a strong role to play in this regard.

MAKING THE NUMBERS COUNT: The roles of Civil Society and Women’s Groups

In addition to the ideals described above, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development also calls for private sector and civil society participation in meeting the Protocol’s objectives for gender equality and equity. It notes that the signatory states shall “strengthen collaboration between government, private

65 Hopwood, G. & Tjirera, E. 2010. An Assessment of Parliamentary Records on Gender-related Issues. Institute for Public Policy Research, March 2010

66 Debates of the NA: Vol.99, Pg. 324

67 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. 2008.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

sector and civil society organisations and international cooperating partners involved in the field of gender and human rights.”⁷⁰

In interviews with various leaders at the party and national level, it was emphasized time and again that civil society has an important role to play in promoting the participation of women in Namibian politics and enhancing gender sensitisation among both male and female MPs. Perhaps the question is: how should they play this role?

Margaret Mensah-Williams said that she sees the role of NGOs and CBOs as facilitators or providers of workshops that promote capacity building around gender equality, as well as providers of civic education on gender equality and participation. She also noted that faith-based organisations have an important role to play at the household level, in terms of teaching moral values that emphasise gender equality and equity. Clara Gowases of the Republican Party agrees with this sentiment, noting that in order to promote women’s participation in politics, “we need to be ready to bridge the political divide and form multi-party caucuses where we engage women both in parliament and in civil society.” She states that civil society has a great deal to offer in terms of lending insights into how various pieces of legislation impact women.

Since independence, NGOs have participated in shedding light on and addressing gender issues in a variety of ways.

Notably, the most recent example of work on promoting women’s participation in politics was the work conducted by the Women’s Leadership Centre in their “Women Claiming Citizenship” campaign in the run-up to the 2009 elections. In this regard, the WLC’s activities included “Consultations with women’s groups and NGOs, the production and distribution of the Advocacy Brochure, a National Training of Trainers Workshop, Women in Dialogue with Political Parties forums, local meetings and distribution of advocacy brochures, and Publicity and media work.”⁷¹

In its campaign materials, the Centre called on Namibian women to make sure that the candidates and the party that they voted for were “committed to addressing issues affecting women and girls”, and to demand that all political parties implement the gender policies and instruments to which Namibia is signatory (specifically the Namibian National Gender Policy, CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, and the SADC Protocol on Gender and

Development). “Women of Namibia! Don’t give your vote away in the November election” was the catchphrase of the campaign.

Calling on political parties to take serious note of women’s voting power, the campaign also made seven key demands to outline the needs of Namibian women. These were:

- Freedom from violence and discrimination,
- Freedom from harmful cultural practices and beliefs,
- Freedom from hunger and poverty,
- Freedom from preventable diseases and access to quality healthcare for all,
- Access to resources and services,
- Freedom from HIV and AIDS, and
- Access to quality education and training

The WLC reported that through the activities it conducted as part of the 2009 campaign, the organisation was able to make a strong impact in a number of ways. It notes, for example, that through consultations with women’s groups and NGOs, the WLC enabled the participation of a number of organisations and all political parties in reviewing the gender agenda, and garnered strengthened partnership in collective policy making. Further, the WLC brought women and gender issues to the fore in dialogue surrounding the elections, raised awareness on women’s rights across regional, racial, ethnic, age, economic

and other boundaries; held political parties accountable for non-implementation of gender laws and policies; promoted greater focus on women’s rights and women’s needs and interests; and strengthened women’s voices in a male-dominated election environment.

The campaign also ensured expert gender analysis on the contents of party manifestos, and did much to educate political parties and communities on gender issues⁷².

In 2001, the Namibian Women’s Manifesto Network also made significant contributions to gender equality discourse when, with the Legal Assistance Centre, it published a paper defining 50/50 options for Namibia’s political landscape.

The paper presented a set of recommendations for change at the local, regional and national level; introduced a 50/50 Bill; and highlighted a number of amendments that needed to be made to bring Namibia towards the realisation of 50 percent women’s representation as called for in the Beijing Platform for Women. The 50/50 Bill essentially provided for “gender balance in the National Assembly, National Council, regional councils and local authority councils; to require that all future elections for local authority councils shall be held on a party list system



70 SADC, 2008. SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

71 Women’s Leadership Center. 2009. Women Claiming Citizenship Campaign – Final Report. WLC, December 2009.

72 Ibid.

with provisions for gender-balanced party lists; to amend the Regional Councils Act, 1992, the Local Authorities Act, 1992 and the Electoral Act, 1992 accordingly; and to provide for incidental matters.”⁷³

In 2003, Women’s Campaign International made an assessment of Namibia’s performance with regards to gender issues, as a means of identifying and developing programs for women in politics. The organisation concluded that:

Civil society has not been very effective in utilising regional and local councils in accessing parliament or pushing issues forward in the general public. Advocacy programmes targeting MPs are carried out but are not always well thought through, and their strategies of action are not always clearly linked to the issue. Therefore, measuring their success is not so clear cut ... Campaigns such as the 50/50 Campaign, organised by the Women’s Manifesto Network, have not enjoyed successful influence through legislative results.

Despite the challenges that exist in translating campaigns and advocacy work into legislative action, civil society’s role remains important. In addition to the above efforts, a number of other NGOs have played important roles in bringing attention to women’s issues, and could continue to contribute to gender sensitisation and mainstreaming in Namibian politics. These organisations include the Sister Namibia Collective, the Namibian National Women’s Organisation, the Legal Assistance Centre, Namibian Men for Change, Namibia National Association for Women in Business, Women’s Action for Development, and NANGOF.

The next section provides a number of recommendations towards attaining equal gender representation in politics, and spurring gender mainstreaming beyond the numbers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The SADC Gender Protocol 2012 Barometer for Namibia offers a number of important next steps for achieving gender equality by 2015. Amongst others, the Barometer proposes:

- There is a need to advocate for affirmative action to increase women’s participation in other levels of governance beyond the local government level.
- There is a need for a robust advocacy strategy to ensure the adoption of a 50/50 bill to increase women’s representation in political decision making positions at national level.
- There is a need to educate political parties so that they mainstream gender sufficiently and effectively in all party structures and policies.

- There is a need to carry out voter education so that they vote for women.
- Parties should ensure that debates on socio-economic issues such as health, land ownership, agricultural production, environmental issues and economic and development policies are gender responsive.
- Training for women aspiring candidates so that they have confidence to enter into politics.

Based on the interviews and the research conducted for this paper, additional recommendations can be offered in engendering Namibia’s political governance landscape in a way that goes beyond simply number-counting, to true empowerment.

Electoral Reform & Zebra Systems

The best way to practically make sustainable changes in balancing gender representation in Namibia, is through electoral law reform that compels parties to ensure 50/50 representation, as the parties are the entities that feed the governing bodies with political figures. This can be implemented through the use of quotas and zebra systems, as it is clear that voluntary quotas at the party level are not doing enough to fully reflect Namibia’s gender construct. In this regard, the recommendations provided by the Electoral Law Reform Commission in the Töttemeyer Report, as well as the 50/50 Bill proposed by the Namibian Women’s Manifesto Network should be given serious consideration. It is important that the various political parties, especially Swapo, make serious efforts to engender their party lists.

Youth Recruitment

Several interviewees noted with concern the lack of young women aspiring for political office in Namibia. Although the Children’s Parliament and other initiatives targeted a school-going youth are present, there is little continuity to ensure that young women look to politics as a viable career option. In order to address this issue, it is important that government ensure a strong presence at career expos and events that allow young people to understand opportunities that exist in governance. Further, because the occupation of political office at the local authority, Regional Council and National Council and National Assembly levels is, for the most part, based on party affiliation and/or a growth path within a party system, it is critical that the various political party youth leagues reflect the national gender programme.

Activate Women’s Parliamentary Caucus

The importance of a Parliamentary Women’s Caucus should not be overlooked! Such a caucus would go a long way to unite female parliamentarians across party lines, and to ensure that they make a greater impact in addressing issues that are important to Namibian women. This united approach would increase the legitimacy of women’s positions on certain issues

⁷³ Hubbard, D. 2001. 50/50: Options for Namibia. Prepared for the Namibian Women’s Manifesto Network. June 2001.

(and not necessarily only women's issues), and would allow women to exert themselves as Namibian women with a defined focus on national issues, rather than merely as party women. As noted by many of those interviewed for this paper, this caucus should be activated as a matter of urgency, and best practices can be noted from the work being done by the National Council's women's caucus.

Involvement of Civil Society Women's Organisations

Civil society women's organisations have an important role to play in advocating, monitoring, researching, training, etc around issues related to gender, and it is important that they take this role seriously in order to create formidable impacts. Campaigns such as the 'Women Claiming Citizenship' campaign should not only enter national dialogue at election time, but should be a constant feature in discourse on gender and women's empowerment in Namibia. Further, these organisations could play an important role in identifying critical topics, and informing and substantiating the activities for a women's parliamentary caucus in influencing the national gender agenda. They can also play an important role in gender sensitisation efforts for members of parliament and other governing bodies.

Skills shortage is not gender-specific

Much of the discourse around empowering women to take on increased leadership in governance has been coupled with comments on the limited skills and expertise of women for these positions. While women have been disenfranchised over the years, and this training is critical, the reality is that both men and women entering political office require training and/or expert assistance to ensure that they have a full grasp of their

responsibilities towards the nation as a whole, to equip them with the requisite knowledge of Namibia's governance system and the meaning of democracy, and to teach them to eloquently articulate national issues and concerns on various platforms, including in parliament, to the media and the nation at large. In ensuring a working democracy with leaders who know how to do their jobs, it is important that a holistic approach is taken when it comes to training.

Diversity beyond gender

Article 23(2) of the Namibian Constitution empowers parliament to adopt affirmative action policies and legislation that provides for the "advancement of persons within Namibia who have been socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged by past discriminatory laws or practices, or for the implementation of policies and programmes aimed at redressing social, economic or educational imbalances in the Namibian society arising out of past discriminatory laws or practices, or for achieving a balanced structuring of the public service, the police force, the defence force, and the prison service". While gender is a significant consideration within this context, it is important to recognise that Namibia's diversity goes beyond a male or female designation, and a broader approach to ensuring the diversity of Namibia's political system is warranted (e.g. to reflect diversity in ability, ethnicity, thought, etc).

The time to act is now!

With the next elections set for November 2014, if Namibia is to meet the 2015 deadline for the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, the time to act on the recommendations noted above – particularly in terms of law reform and the implementation of quotas and zebra systems – is now.

INTERVIEWS

The following people were interviewed for this paper:

- Clara Gowases: Republican Party
- Ignatius Shixwameni: All People's Party
- Margaret Mensah-Williams: National Council
- McHenry Venaani: DTA
- Rosalina Nghidinwa: Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare
- Selma Shilongo: Rally for Democracy and Progress
- Veronica de Klerk: Women's Action for Development

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About the Author

Nangula Shejvali is an IPPR Research Associate and an independent communications and research consultant. Her research portfolio has covered a range of subjects, linked mainly by their focus on organizational and/or national development. At IPPR, this has included research on topics such as Black Economic Empowerment, SME development, comparative democratization and electoral reform. She is currently responsible for writing and compiling the IPPR's Election Watch bulletin and helps to coordinate the Democracy Report project.

Shejvali holds a BA degree in International Affairs and Africana Studies from Lafayette College (2006) in the US and a MS Business in Global Marketing Management from Virginia Commonwealth University (2012) in the US.

About Democracy Report

Democracy Report is a project of the IPPR which analyses and disseminates information relating to the legislative agenda of Namibia's Parliament. The project aims to promote public participation in debates concerning the work of Parliament by publishing regular analyses of legislation and other issues before the National Assembly and the National Council.

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The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) is a not-for-profit organisation with a mission to deliver independent, analytical, critical yet constructive research on social, political and economic issues that affect development in Namibia. The IPPR has been established in the belief that development is best promoted through free and critical debate informed by quality research.



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