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A THORN IN THE FLESH FOR GENDER EQUALITY: HOW THE GENDER GAP IN NAMIBIA'S REGIONAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS UNDERMINES THE COUNTRY'S OTHERWISE IMPRESSIVE GENDER EQUITY GAINS AT OTHER LEVELS OF GOVERNANCE

"The Gender Gap is the difference between men and women's participation and representation in politics exists worldwide. Its roots are patriarchal attitudes, laws, practices, religions, cultures and educational systems, as well as economic inequality between men and women and the prevalence of violence against women, among other factors."

Rajju Malla Dhakal, Contesting Patriarchy: The Gender Gap and Gender-based Violence in Nepali Politics and the Constituent Assembly Election 2013. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA).

Over the last year, Namibia made some unprecedented gains in increasing the participation of women in politics. Currently, 42% of parliamentarians in the National Assembly are women (thanks mainly to the Swapo party's 2014 constitutional provision to implement 50/50 through the use of a zebra list) At the Local Authority level, due to existing quota systems, about 42% of councillors are women. However, at the Regional Council Level, these gains appear out of reach.

During the 27 November 2015 Regional Council election, only 15% of the 284 candidates who participated as candidates, and 16% of the 121 candidates elected as councillors, are women. This is a far cry from the 50% prescribed in Namibia's Gender Policy and Plan of Action. However, at the Regional Council level, these gains have not been made.



For the 27 November 2015 Regional Council elections, only 15% of the 284 candidates participating in the election are women - a far cry from the 50% prescribed in Namibia's Gender Policy and Plan of Action. These numbers do not at all look promising for equal gender representation in Namibia on the whole, and clearly diminish the gains made at the National Assembly and Local Authority governance levels.

Evidence shows that the "equitable participation of women in politics and government is essential to building and sustaining democracy."¹ In the Namibian context, this is no different, and

¹ National Democratic Institute, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.ndi.org/gender-women-democracy>



although several gains have been made in National Assembly and Local Authority elections, the country still has some way to go both quantitatively and qualitatively.

This briefing paper provides a snapshot of the participation of women in the 2015 regional council elections, highlights some of the advances made in gender equality vis-à-vis gender representation in politics, analyses the environment for women's participation at Namibia's different levels of elected governance, and provides recommendations to get political parties to come to the table in promoting women's participation on regional council elections.

Gender in the 2015 Regional Council Elections

During the 27 Nov. 2015 Regional Council election, 121 councillors were elected across Namibia's 14 regions. Only 16% of these regional councillors for the next five years are women (i.e. 19 out of 121) are women.

Two regional councils - Omaheke and Zambezi - have no female councillors.

Eight regional councils each have only one woman on their councils. These are Hardap, //Karas, Kavango East, Kavango West, Kunene, Ohangwena, Omusati and Oshana.

Erongo and Oshikoto regional councils each have two women on their councils.

Khomas and Otjozondjupa are the most representative for women, with women occupying 4 of the 10 constituency seats in Khomas Region, and 3 of the 7 seats in Otjozondjupa.

Although this outcome is slightly better than the 12% women's representation in the 2010-2015 Regional Councils, this is still a far cry from the 50% target in Namibia's National Gender Policy, the National Gender Plan of Action, the SADC Gender Protocol, and several other national policies or regional/international instruments which Namibia has ratified.

Regional councils are tasked with the planning and development of their regions. And development requires the active voice of women in the decision making process.

However, given that nothing exists in the Regional Councils Act, the Electoral Act, or other relevant legislation to ensure a more equal gender representation at this level of governance, it is largely left to the political parties to ensure their party lists are reflective of Namibian society.

For 27 November 2015 Regional Council elections—only 43 of the 284 constituency candidates across the country were women. That is, 15% of Regional Council candidates were women.

And in the three largest parties – Swapo, DTA and RDP – 18% of the 232 candidates fielded from these parties were women. Despite advancing the cause of equal participation of the sexes through a change to the party's constitution that saw women being listed in 50/50 zebra style for the National Assembly election in 2014, only 23 of Swapo's 121 candidates (19%) for the regional council elections were women. 5 of these women were guaranteed their seats as constituency councillors as they were standing in the 26 uncontested constituencies in which only Swapo put forward candidates.

The official opposition - DTA of Namibia - did only slightly better in this regard. 13 of their 58 candidates (22.4%) taking part in the Regional Council election were women. And of the Rally for Democracy and Progress's (RDP's) 53 candidates participating in the Regional Council Elections, only 6 (or 11%) were women.

Overall, as is currently the case, the numbers do not look promising at all for gender equality at the regional government level. The complete list of parties that participated in the election, and the number of women candidates presented is shown in the table below. Of the eight candidates running independently in the Regional Council elections, none are women.

Concern about the low participation of women at the regional council level has been expressed time and again. But unlike the National Assembly and Local Authority elections, there are

Table 1: Participation of women in Namibia's 2015 Regional Council elections

Party	# Constituencies Contested	# Female Candidates	Percentage of Female Candidates
All People's Party	15	0	0%
DTA of Namibia	58	13	22%
Independent Candidates	8	0	0%
NUDO	13	0	0%
Rally for Democracy and Progress	53	6	11%
Swanu of Namibia	5	0	0%
Swapo Party of Namibia	121	23	19%
United Democratic Front of Namibia	8	1	12.5%
United People's Movement	3	1	33%
TOTAL	284	44	15%

Source: ECN – Regional Council list of political parties and candidates, 2015.

Table 2: Number of Women in the National Council over the Years, from the various parties

Year	Party	Total # Seats	# Men	# Women	% Women MPs in NC
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	

no quotas or implemented policies to speak of – either at the party level (per the NA elections) or in national legislation (per the LA elections) – when it comes to the Regional Council elections.

In August this year, Deputy Minister of Urban and Regional Development, Derek Klazen, said “Namibia should deliberate on efforts to ensure that there is gender balance at regional and local government level by giving women equal access and full participation in power, decision-making and leadership.”² Although Swapo’s 50/50 policy has not extended to the regional councils, Klazen also encouraged opposition parties to “emulate the gender parity in politics and governance as implemented by the Swapo Party through its 50/50 policy, which resulted in an increase in female members of parliament and more women in ministerial positions.” He was quoted as saying that “This year the country will hold both regional council and local authority elections. It is, however, observed that in certain instances, structures of political parties can also be an obstacle of women participation in governance. It is for this reason that I appeal to parties to examine their structures to ensure that women are advanced into active leadership roles”.³

To date, however, although various parties have made sweeping pronouncements on increasing the participation of women in politics – perhaps aside from the UPM where one of the three candidates running in the elections is a woman – none of the participating political parties have actually ensured that their candidates list at this level of government reflects concerns about gender equity.

It is important to note that the participation of women in the Regional Council elections can have a rollover effect into their representation in the National Council. Following the 2015 Regional Council election, in accordance with constitutional changes made in 2014, three Regional Council representatives will be nominated by each Regional Council to represent

their regions in the National Council. To date, there has been no prescription with regards to women’s representation in the National Council – whether in the Regional Councils Act, which regulates the election of members from the Regional Councils to the National Council, or in the Constitution.

In 2014, IPPR noted that: ‘Women’s representation in the National Council has remained stagnant since 2004, with a mere 7 female members, out of a total of 26 (i.e.26.9%). This is a vast improvement from the 1 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 Institute further noted that ‘the proportion of women in the National Council (26.9%) is higher than that of women in the Regional Councils as a whole (12%), 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’.

Namibia still has a chance to redeem itself in terms of its commitment to the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and other signed and ratified instruments, by encouraging regional councils to ensure that at least one of the three representatives nominated to serve in the National Council is a female. However, with no women elected to the Omaheke and Zambezi Regional Council, women will remain underrepresented in terms of regional decision-making structures.

Not practicing what they preach!

In their manifestos, the political parties that participated in the 2015 Regional Council elections do not generally take a stand specific to women’s participation in the Regional Council elections. However, while some parties are non-committal to equal representation, several do take a general stance on women’s participation in governance, making statements that generally

² Namibia Press Agency, 2015. Equal gender representation needed at all levels. In The Namibian, 12 August 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=140557&page=archive-read> on 20 November 2015

³ Ibid.

call for the equal participation and representation of women in decision-making structures.

Parties that express a commitment to equal participation/representation in decision-making in their manifestos include the All People's Party (with 0% female candidates in the election), NUDO of Namibia (with 0% female candidates in the election), RDP (with 11% female candidates in the election), which also highlights 'gradual implementation of this ideal, and Swanu (with 0% female candidates in the election). Although Swapo does not specifically call for 50/50 in its manifesto, it does refer to national documents that call for this ideal, and has a constitution that "compels all party structures to comply with the

50/50 gender representation requirement by adopting a zebra style electoral system."⁴ As noted earlier, in the 2015 Regional Council election, only 19% of Swapo's 121 candidates were women.

The table below highlights the statements made in reference to gender and/or women's empowerment in the manifestos of the political parties taking part in the 2015 Regional Council elections. When taken in stride with Table 1, which presents the percentage of female candidates from each party, it is clear that Namibia's political parties are only paying lip service to gender equality in governance, but are not practicing what they preach.

Table 3: Political party positions on gender and/or women's representation, according to their 2014 election manifestos

APP	"The All People's Party is for total gender equality. 50/50 in decision making structures must become a reality in our lifetime. The All People's Party will make sure that for any minister that is of a sex the deputy shall be of another sex. We will also make sure that this applied to the whole public service at the management cadre level and for all positions at state owned enterprises, at municipal, town council and village council levels. We shall also offer incentives to those private companies who implement the 50/50 policy in their establishments."
DTA of Namibia	The DTA of Namibia's manifesto contains a section titled "Women: Mothers of our Souls, Builders of our Nation" in which it outlines a number of important commitments related to women, including the highly publicized idea of instituting a Single Mother's Grant. With respect to gender equality in governance, the DTA's manifesto states that the party "recognizes the important role of women in development of the society and growth of the nation, and remains committed to give a high priority to Women's Empowerment and welfare. " It goes on to note that it "Women's welfare and development will be accorded a high priority at all levels within the government, and DTA is committed to 30% reservation in parliamentary seats with in line with SADC Protocol and AU requirements." With regards to the judiciary, the DTA also noted that it "Aims to enhance the number of women in the Bar as well as Bench, reducing the gender gap in judiciary."
Nudo	In a section titled "Women Empowerment and Gender", Nudo defines the problem as being that "Inequality of women to men as a societal design is the root cause of women dependence on men." The party's solution to this problem is as follows: "There will be preference for women in position of power and employment in order to raise their participation. Women will be equal participant in decision making and partners in the economy. The rights of vulnerable will be protected."
RDP	With regards to women enhancing the participation of women in governance and in decision-making positions, RDP notes that it will "Increase the role of women in government to participate in key decisions making structures"; and that it will promote "leadership with the focus on the gradual implementation of equal (50-50) gender representation based on merit."
Swanu	Under the section on 'Democracy' in its manifesto, Swanu notes that "within the ambit of democracy and equality, SWANU gives its full and unconditional support to the objective of meeting a 50-50 gender balance in all of the country's public institutions. As a sign of SWANU's uncompromising stance on this issue, the party has already inculcated a 50-50 balance in its structures."
Swapo	Swapo's manifesto contains a section titled 'Gender Equality and Mainstreaming', which highlights several actions that Government has already taken, including the National Gender Policy and the National Plan of Action on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) "which serves as a guide for the implementation of the National Gender Policy 2010-2020 especially in the areas of GBV and human rights". All these national policies referred to call for 50/50 representation of women in governance. It also highlights a number of activities currently taking place through Government efforts (note that a distinction should be made between party and government). Under it's promises on gender, aside from ongoing efforts to mainstream gender something new that the party presents includes efforts to "Mentor and coach women politicians to take up leadership positions. The objective is to empower women economically, socially and politically through creating conducive environment and strengthening institutional capacity to engage in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation process that show gender results."
UDF	The UDF manifesto does not contain any clear stance or programme on gender, except for a pledge in the manifesto promising the "involvement of women" .
UPM	The UPM's Manifesto does not contain any special provisions on gender, except in it's 16th point, which notes that the party will "make use of the parliamentary forum to address issues regarding Education, Health, Gender Equality, GBV, economic, social agriculture and other important services at all levels of government."

^{*}This table only presents information from the manifestos of political parties that took part in the 2015 Regional Council election.

⁴ Swapo Party of Namibia, 2015. Retrieved from http://www.swapoparty.org/swapo_constitution_comes_into_force_on_monday.htm

Setting the Example: Gender in the National Assembly and Local Authorities

Thanks primarily to Swapo's constitutional change to adopt a 50/50 zebra list system in the 2014 National Assembly elections – with 42% women in the National Assembly – Namibia now ranks 3rd in the SADC region (behind Seychelles and South Africa)⁵ and among the Top 10 in the world (at 9th position) for the percentage of women in parliament (Lower House or Single House)⁶.

At the Local Authority level, with a quota system in place, Namibia has also performed well with respect to the representation of women in governance. Currently, 42% of local authority councilors are women. For the 2015 Local Authority elections, 54% of the candidates on the local authorities party lists were women.

According to the Local Authorities Amendment Act the following gender quotas apply with respect to local authority elections, in that "each party list shall contain as candidates for such election:

- (a) in the case of a municipal councilor 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 council or town council consisting of 11 or more members, the names of at least five female persons."⁷

Since its implementation, this quota system has ensured that about 40% of local authority representatives are females.

In fact, in the recently held 2015 Local Authority election, of the total number on the collective party lists submitted, 54% are women, setting a strong precedent for political parties in terms of gender equality and representation. What remains for analysis, however, is whether this figure will translate to a similar representation after the election, as the order placement on or selection from the party lists are still at play.

This high proportion of women participating in this election also shows legislative quota systems at play, and how they deliver for gender equality.

At the National Assembly level there is no legislation that imposes quotas with respect to gender representation on political parties. The Electoral Act (No. 5 of 2014) is itself silent on the topic of women's representation in elections. As such, it is left to political parties to come to the table in ensuring that their party and candidate lists are somewhat reflective of the Namibia in which we live.

Because the majority party – Swapo – implemented a constitutional provision in 2014 to ensure 50/50 gender representation through the use of a zebra list, and given the party's strong performance in the 2014 election (where it won 81% of the national vote, which translates to 77 parliamentary seats), women's representation in the National Assembly has climbed from 24% at the end of the 5th National Assembly, to 42% at the beginning of the 6th. (Note that other parties have in the past used 50/50 lists and the zebra list, but because their share of the vote was so small compared to the Swapo vote, the impact of their progressive policies had not been felt until the majority party adopted such a system.)

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
1st 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	
	NPF	1	1	0	
	TOTAL	78	73	5	
2nd 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	

⁵ SADC, 2015. SADC Gender Monitor - Tracking Progress on Implementation of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development - With Special Focus on Part Three Governance Articles 12 and 13 - Women in Politics and Decision-Making Positions. Retrieved from http://www.sadc.int/files/1214/0558/8114/SADC_GENDER_MONITOR_2013_-_ENGLISH.pdf.

⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015.

⁷ Local Authorities Amendment Act (Act 3 of 1997)

Year	Party	Total # Seats	# Men	# Women	% Women in Parliament
3rd 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	
4th 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	
5th 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	
6th National Assembly 2015-2020	Swapo	77+8	45	40	42%
	DTA	5	3	2	
	RDP	3	2	1	
	APP	2	2	0	
	NUDO	2	2	0	
	Swanu	2	2	0	
	WRP	2	2	0	
	UPM	1	1	0	
	UDF	1	1	0	
	RP	1	0	1	
	TOTAL	104	60	44	

Source: National Institute for Democracy, 2005, Gender Links, 2011, IPPR, 2014

The nature of the beast? Gender in the context of FPTP vs PR systems

Both the National Assembly and Local Authority elections are run according to a Proportional Representation (PR) system, and in each case, either party policies or national legislation have had a positive impact on the level of women's representation in governance structures.

Regional Council elections, however, are run according to the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system, in which the 'winner takes all'. In this election, candidates compete under the banner of their parties, or as independent candidates, to be elected as the councillor for their constituency. Over the years, the number of women represented at this level of governance in Namibia has never reached more than 20%. In fact, following the last regional council elections in 2010, this figure stood at only 12%.

Over the years, research has shown that FPTP systems 'exclude women from the legislature' because in "the 'most broadly acceptable candidate' syndrome affects the ability of

women to be elected to legislative office because they are often less likely to be selected as candidates by male-dominated party structures."⁸ In the Namibian context, party structures are generally male dominated, and one only needs to look to the percentage of female candidates participating in the constituency elections to see that here, the 'most broadly acceptable candidate' syndrome is at play.

International IDEA also reports "Evidence from around the world demonstrates that proportional electoral systems are conducive to the election of more women candidates than majority systems. The total average number of women elected to parliament in 2012 using PR systems was 25 per cent; mixed electoral systems and majority/plurality (e.g. FPTP) electoral systems resulted in 18 and 14 per cent of women elected, respectively (IPU 2012)."⁹ Although Namibia has not implemented a quota system at the Regional Council level, it is easy to see how the PR system – particularly when voluntary party quotas are applied, can be more favourable for women's representation in decision-making structures.

The insert below highlights a view from the Fawcett Society, on why FPTP systems do not deliver for women:

First Past The Post: why it does not deliver for women¹⁰

In FPTP systems, contests are held in single-member constituencies and the winner is the candidate with the most votes, though not necessarily an absolute majority of the votes. Accordingly, FPTP systems produce a disproportionate result between votes cast and seats won for parties, normally over-representing the leading party and particularly penalising minority parties whose support is widely dispersed rather than concentrated.

The FPTP system can distort voters' preferences as a candidate only needs one more vote than that received by any other candidate to win. Therefore voters may vote 'tactically' for their second or third choices to avoid letting the party they most dislike in.

Research suggests that multi-member proportional representation systems are more likely to benefit women than plurality-majority systems such as FPTP. There is a distinct gap in women's representation in countries with single-member constituency electoral systems and those with PR systems. When there is only one seat per constituency to be won as in the FPTP system, appealing to a broader base of voters is seen as riskier for parties. This is because female candidates must compete directly against a male candidate, which often implies more risk for the party as in nominating a woman, a party must deny the selection of a often established, recognisable man in the same constituency. Therefore there is less incentive for parties to balance their field of candidates to include more women, as only one candidate will be able to represent the party banner and cannot be seen to be risky within the party or to voters.

(Source: The Fawcett Society, 2012)

⁸ International IDEA, 2006. Electoral System Design: the New International IDEA Handbook, page 37. Retrieved from http://www.idea.int/publications/esd/upload/esd_chapter3.pdf on 20 November 2015. |

⁹ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2014. Atlas of Electoral Gender Quotas, page 16. Retrieved from http://www.idea.int/publications/atlas-of-electoral-gender-quotas/upload/Atlas-on-Electoral-Gender-Quotas_3.pdf on 22 November 2015.

¹⁰ The Fawcett Society, 2012. The impact of electoral systems on women's political representation. Retrieved from <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Fawcett-briefing-on-impact-of-electoral-systems-on-womens-representation-October-2012.pdf> on 23 November 2015.

A Question of Political Will

Beyond the nature of the type of system used, however, enhancing the participation and/or representation of women at all levels of politics depends a great deal on the political will of parties taking part in the election (particularly in terms of National Assembly and Regional Council elections, since they have no choice in Local Authority elections).

Data from Afrobarometer¹¹ demonstrates that Namibians “Like most citizens in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Namibians express high levels of support for women in political leadership, with 80% agreeing that ‘Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.’”¹² While this does not outrightly mean that Namibians are in favour of quota systems to improve the number of women in decision making, it does, however, show a strong level of support for gender equality.

However, it is the political parties that hold the most power when it comes to the representation of men and women in

their political party structures. And it is up to the political parties to act on their word and/or embrace the national agenda and policy on enhancing women’s representation in governance. Some of the national policies that guide Namibia’s gender objectives include the National Gender Plan, the National Gender Plan of Action, and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which Namibia has ratified.

In terms of support for equal women’s participation across the board, based on the party lists submitted for the NA and LA elections, and the candidates submitted for the RC election, Swapo emerges as the overall winner, although it still has some way to go in terms of representation at the RC level, where the official opposition, DTA of Namibia, and UPM (albeit with only three candidates) outperform the rest.

The table below provides an overview of women’s participation as candidates, or as part of the party lists submitted for the National Assembly elections last year, and the Regional Council and Local Authority elections this year.

Table 5: Performance of political parties in party list/candidate representation in the National Assembly, Local Authority and Regional Council elections.

PARTY	NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (2014)				LOCAL AUTHORITIES (2015)		REGIONAL COUNCILS (2015)		
	% of women candidates on the full party list	% of women in Top 10 on party list	# seats in the National Assembly	# and % females in the National Assembly	# Local Authorities being contested	% females in submitted party lists	# candidates contesting in election	# female candidates	% female candidates
All People’s Party (APP)	45	40	2	0	16	53%	15	0	0
DTA of Namibia	45	40	5	2 (40%)	48	60%	58	13	22
National Unity Democratic Organisation (Nudo)	30	30	2	0	14	48%	13	0	0
Rally for Democracy and Progress (RDP)	39	20	3	1 (33%)	43	57%	53	6	11
Republican Party of Namibia (RP)	46	60	1	1 (100%)	12	63%	-	-	-
SWANU of Namibia	43	50	1	0	5	41%	5	0	0
Swapo Party of Namibia	50	50	77+8	40 (47%)	57	51%	121	23	19
United Democratic Front of Namibia (UDF)	36	30	2	0	16	55%	8	1	13
United People’s Movement (UPM)	48	40	1	0	2	63%	3	1	33
Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP)	31	20	2	0	5	44%	-	-	-
TOTALS			104	44 (42%)	57	54%	284	44	15%

¹¹ Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. The Afrobarometer team in Namibia, led by Survey Warehouse and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), interviewed 1,200 adult Namibians in October 2014.

¹² Shejavali, 2015. Gender in Namibia: Growing support for women’s leadership, concerns about violence. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 22. Institute for Public Policy Research, 2015.

The table above only shows the parties that currently have seats in the National Assembly. Other political parties taking part in the Local Authority Elections include the Christian Democratic Voice (CDV) – competing in four Local Authorities (37% females on combined lists), DPN – participating in three Local Authorities (59% females), NDP – taking part in two lo-

cal authorities (68% females), and the Congress of Democrats – competing in only one local authority (100% females). Additionally, 7 non-partisan associations are also taking part in the election, with each competing in one local authority, and with a combined average of 45% females on their party lists.

Table 6: National gender policies and international or regional instruments on gender, signed/ratified by Namibia

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	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 The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
Married Persons Equality Act (1996) 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	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) 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) 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 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)

Source, IPPR, 2014.

Removing the Thorn: Are Quotas the Way Forward?

While the National Assembly and Local Authority structures set important examples for the level of political participation between the sexes that can be achieved and exceeded, they provide two different methods of making important advances in gender equality in governance.

On the one hand (with LA elections), legislated party list quotas are in place, and have resulted in the comparatively strong (currently 42%) representation of women at this level of governance. And on the other hand (in the case of the NA elections), political will and voluntary political party quotas have delivered for gender equality, resulting in impressive gains in this regard.

When it comes to the Regional Council elections, although political will appeared to be present in theory through party manifestos, the practice has been different, as noted in the percentage of female candidates being fielded for this election. Dahlerup posits that: “in almost all political systems, no matter what the electoral regime, it is the political parties, not the voters, that constitute the real gatekeepers into elected offices. Consequently, the party nomination practices should be kept in focus.”¹³

This position is expanded upon by OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which, in its Handbook on Promoting Women’s Participation in Political Parties explains that “The extent of women’s representation in national legislatures or executives in any given country is determined by a wide range of factors. These include the general progress

towards achieving equality of rights and opportunities among women and men in the public and private spheres, the design of political and electoral systems and the level of institutionalization of, and transparency in, political decision-making. Within this complex set of factors, however, political parties are increasingly referred to as the “gatekeepers” of democracy – and of women’s political participation in particular.”¹⁴

In the Namibian context, it is clear from the participation in and results of the Regional Council elections that political parties themselves can not be relied upon at the Regional Council level, to bring about high levels of participation of women in these elections.

As such, it is important that other measures are considered to make the advances necessary to meet national gender objectives.

Whatever system is followed, Dahlerup stresses that “Rules are not enough. Whether a quota system reaches its objective depends largely on the process of implementation.”¹⁵ She goes on to caution that “quotas for women do not remove all barriers for women in politics. Stigmatization of women politicians may even increase in quota systems. Difficulties combining family life, work life and politics still remain a severe obstacle to women’s full citizenship. Further, political representation cannot stand alone, but must be complemented with necessary socio-economic changes in society at large.”¹⁶

The insert below provides a brief overview of gender quotas in politics, what they are, why they are used, and how they work to advance women’s participation and representation in politics.

GENDER QUOTAS – WHAT, WHY, HOW?¹⁷

Gender quotas are numerical targets that stipulate the number or percentage of women that must be included in a candidate list or the number of seats to be allocated to women in a legislature. They aim to reverse discrimination in law and practice and to level the playing field for women and men in politics. Gender quotas, as they mostly regulate political parties’ actions, underscore the notion of political parties as the ‘gatekeepers’ through which citizens pursue opportunities for political leadership (Dahlerup 2006). Therefore quotas play a critical role in providing meaningful and effective opportunities for female party members to access elected public offices. To date, gender quotas have proved to be the single most effective tool for ‘fast-tracking’ women’s representation in elected bodies of government. It is, however, important to note that as an extensive body of research in this field suggests, quotas may have a differential impact in different contexts and in different electoral systems and may take longer than a single electoral cycle to produce the desired impact.

Furthermore, electoral gender quotas do not remove all structural, institutional and societal barriers for women in politics, and need to be complemented by other measures designed to level the playing field for women.

There are three key types of gender quotas in politics:

1. Legislated candidate quotas – These quotas regulate the gender composition of the candidate lists and are binding by law for all political parties in the election; they are mandated either through national constitutions or by electoral legislation.

¹³ Dahlerup, D., 2006. Quotas – A key to Equality?

¹⁴ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), 2014. Handbook on Promoting Women’s Participation in Political Parties.

¹⁵ Dahlerup, D., 2005. Increasing Women’s Political Representation: New Trends in Gender Quotas. In Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers. International IDEA, 2005.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2014. Atlas of Electoral Gender Quotas, page 16. Retrieved from http://www.idea.int/publications/atlas-of-electoral-gender-quotas/upload/Atlas-on-Electoral-Gender-Quotas_3.pdf on 22 November 2015.

2. Legislated 'reserved seats' – These measures regulate by law the gender composition of elected bodies, by reserving a certain number or percentage of seats for women members, implemented through special electoral procedures; they are mandated either through national constitutions or by electoral legislation.
3. Party quotas (also called voluntary party quotas) – These quotas are adopted by individual parties for their own candidate lists, and are usually enshrined in party statutes and rules.

All key types of gender quotas are increasingly used around the world to promote women's political participation and representation.

...

So what do quotas actually do, and how do they work? In a nutshell, gender quota rules provide the minimum number of women (or women and men) that candidate lists should include (legislated candidate quotas and voluntary party quotas) or the number of seats that should be allocated to women in legislatures (reserved seats for women). The introduction of a quota system is aimed at 'placing the burden of recruitment not on the individual woman, but on those who control the recruitment process' (Dahlerup 2006). Such new rules are intended to transform the way in which parties choose their candidates, by making political parties look for potential female candidates in a more serious and committed way, recruit more women for political positions, and thus become more gender-balanced in their internal composition and in their parliamentary groups/delegations.

(Source: International IDEA, 2014)

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

In his book, *Strengthening the Interactions between Civil Society and Regional and Local Government in Namibia*, Professor Totemeyer states, among several other points, that "whether at national or subnational level, ideal quality governance should respect and apply gender sensitivity; and must apply affirmative action and economic empowerment."¹⁸

In order to achieve this and to come closer to meeting our national objectives on the representation of women in decision-making structures, the following recommendations should be considered for future elections (or applied currently where applicable):

- Amend the Regional Councils' Act to establish a quota determining the minimum number of candidates of either sex to take part in the Regional Council elections to improve the participation and representation of women at this level.
- Encourage elected Regional Councils to – where possible – ensure that at least one of the three candidates nominated to represent the region in the National Council is a woman.
- Political parties should adopt voluntary quotas to improve the number of female candidates fielded for the Regional Council elections.
- Address the barriers/obstacles that keep women from actively and effectively participating in politics. Such obstacles include "financial impediments, mobility and public safety, intimidation and violence, etc."¹⁹
- Address intra-party democracy systems in political parties to improve the environment for members to participate in electoral processes. Additionally, address the "the 'most broadly acceptable candidate' syndrome" that currently hinder the candidature of women for regional council elections.
- Civil society and citizens at large should hold government accountable for its own policies, and advocate for the type of change that would allow the nation to meet its targets and obligations (e.g. 50/50 in decision making per the National Gender Policy, 50/50 per the SADC Gender protocol, etc). As the UN puts it, we need to "strengthen the overall accountability of democratic institutions to women and gender equality by improving the transparency and accountability of public officials and institutions on their gender equality commitments."²⁰
- Political parties should mainstream gender into their policies²¹ (e.g. constitution, manifestos, etc) more effectively and practice what they preach in line with their gender agenda.
- Voter education should include gender as an important topic – not only with regards to the presence of women in decision-making structures, but more specifically on the important role of gender equality in democracy building.

¹⁸ Totemeyer, GKH., 2014. *Strengthening the Interactions between Civil Society and Regional and Local Government in Namibia*. Namibia Institute for Democracy, 2014.

¹⁹ Tommasoli, M., 2011. Gender equality is good for democracy, but how can democracy best deliver for gender equality? International IDEA, 25 May 2011. Retrieved from http://www.idea.int/un/deliver_gender_equality.cfm.

²⁰ United Nations, 2013. *Democracy and Gender Equality: The Role of the UN*. Discussion Paper, September 2013.

²¹ SADC Gender Protocol 2015 Baramoter: Namibia, 2015. (Chapter 2: Governance)

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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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Election Watch features electoral analysis and voter education ahead of the 2014 National Assembly and Presidential Elections. Election Watch is a project of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR). It is produced with the support of the European Union. The content of Election Watch is the sole responsibility of the IPPR.

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Incorporated Association Not for Gain Registration Number 21/2000/468

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