



“Beyond Numbers – Quotas in practise”

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As a result of the fervour created by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development, specifying a 30 percent target for women in decision-making by 2005, attention has understandably focused more on quantitative rather than qualitative arguments concerning gender and governance.

Little research has been conducted in the region on the extent to which quotas affect the ability of women elected using such mechanisms to do their job once they are in office. Ironically, those who argue against quotas on the basis that they will lead to tokenism seldom follow up to see if this has been the case.

In 2003, Gender Links, a Southern African non-governmental organization (NGO) that specialises in gender, media and governance, undertook the first qualitative study of women in decision-making in the region.

Ringing up the changes: Gender in Southern African politics set out to measure the impact that women have had in three areas of political decision-making – parliament, cabinet and local government – using case material from six Southern African states.

These consist of four countries that have a good track record in increasing female participation in decision-making (Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa and Zambia) and two that have not done so well (Lesotho and Zambia).

The study measured the impact of a ‘critical mass of women’¹ on such areas as institutional culture and gender and service delivery. In addition, it examined the ability of female decision-makers to challenge the status quo, changes in the attitudes of men

and to laws and policies that affect women directly, and gender mainstreaming in all laws and policies.

While the study did not focus on quotas per se, it revealed interesting findings on the extent to which they are seen either to help or hinder women in decision-making. As this conference is on quotas, this paper will concentrate on the findings relating to quotas and efficacy, bearing in mind that they constitute only a small proportion of the overall study.²

Electoral systems and quotas – lessons learned

All the evidence from Southern Africa – and this concurs with experiences around the globe – is that women’s increased representation in decision-making structures seldom happens as a consequence of some evolutionary miracle.

Table 1 shows the various possible combinations of quotas and electoral systems, and provides examples of each of these from Southern Africa. Essentially, there are three types of electoral system: proportional representation (PR), constituency or first-past-the-post (FPTP), and mixed. And there are two possible types of quotas: voluntary party quotas and constitutional or legislated quotas.

Table 1: Possible combinations of quotas and electoral systems

Type of quota	PR system	Constituency based system	Mixed PR and constituency based system
Voluntary party quota	E.g. African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa; Frelimo in Mozambique.	E.g. Opposition parties in Botswana in the 1999 elections.	E.g. South Africa local government in 1995 – ANC voluntary quota for list seats.
Constitutional or legislated quota	E.g. Local government elections in Namibia.	E.g. The Tanzanian constitution reserves 20% of seats for women (distributed on a PR basis).	E.g. South Africa local government elections in 2000; Municipal Structures Act stipulated that parties should strive to ensure parity.

Table 2 summarises the outlook for 2005 (the year set for a target of 30 percent representation of women in SADC legislatures) and links this to the type of electoral systems and the existence of quotas in SADC countries. It shows that Seychelles is the only high performing country that does not have a quota and has primarily a constituency based electoral system.

Striking features of the table are set out below.

- Apart from Seychelles, all of the other countries that have met or are likely to meet the target have a quota.
- Three of these five cases (Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa) have a PR electoral system.
- Tanzania, meanwhile, has a constitutional quota.

- With the exception of Angola, which has a mixed electoral system, all of the eight countries that have not met or are unlikely to meet the target have a constituency based electoral system. None of the eight countries has quotas.
- The countries with the highest proportion of women in decision-making structures have either recently emerged from struggle or conflict situations, or have had ruling parties with social democratic inclinations, or a combination of the two.

Table 2: The outlook for 2005 linked to electoral systems and quotas

Country	Current % of women in parliament	Current % of women in local government	Next election	Electoral system		Quota
				Const	PR	
Made it to 30% representation of women						
Seychelles	29.4%	57.7%	2007	YES		NO
South Africa	30.0%	28.2%	2004		YES*	YES – political party quota
Mozambique	30.0%	29.7%	2005		YES	YES – political party quota
Might make it to 30% representation of women						
Namibia	26.39%	43.3%	2004		YES	YES – Local Government
Tanzania	22.3%	34.2%	2005	YES		YES – constitutional quota
Unlikely to make it to 30% representation of women						
Botswana	18.0%	22.8%	2004	YES		NO
Lesotho	10.8%		2005	YES		NO
Malawi	9.33%	6.2%	2004	YES		NO
Zimbabwe	10.0%	4.3%	2005	YES		NO
Angola	15.4%	1.2%	UNSURE	YES		NO
WON'T MAKE IT						
Mauritius	5.7%	9.2%	2006	YES		NO
Zambia	12.0%	6.3%	2006	YES		NO
Swaziland	3.08%	18.5%	2004	YES		NO
UNSURE						
DRC						

An interesting finding in the study is that 76 percent of the 172 politicians canvassed (about one third of whom were men) said that they supported quotas. This was especially true of women, and of women in the two countries with a constituency based system and a low level of female representation (Lesotho and Zambia).

But a disappointing finding is that other than in South Africa at the national level, and in Namibia at the local level, where gender equality has been a consideration in whether or not to switch from the PR system to a constituency based or mixed system, electoral systems have hardly featured in debates on how to meet the 30 percent target.

There has been even less consideration of what the combination of quotas and different kinds of electoral systems means in practise. To some extent, this is understandable.

When seeking to overcome the first hurdle – that is, women’s right to access decision-making structures – there is a caution about raising debates that could be snapped up by those opposed to quotas.

But the underlying theme of *Ring up the changes* is that quantitative and qualitative arguments need to go hand in hand. They can strengthen the argument for quotas, while pointing to some of the concerns that need to be taken into account when formulating strategies to ensure the effective participation of women once they enter decision-making fora.

Voluntary Quotas in the PR system at the National Level

The main advantage of voluntary quotas in the PR system is that parties ‘own’ the quotas, there is no visible difference between male and female candidates, and female candidates are less likely to feel ‘different’. This is especially so in countries where the ruling parties have a history of liberation struggles, and where gender equality has been seen as integral to the broader struggle for national liberation.

In Southern Africa, this combination of factors is found in South Africa and Mozambique, the two countries with the highest proportion of women in parliament in the region. In both cases, the ruling parties – the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frelimo) in Mozambique – have exceeded their 30 percent quota, but where opposition parties field lower proportions of women, to achieve an overall average of 30 percent women in parliament.

In both instances, opposition parties have been against quotas, but have grudgingly accepted that the position taken by the ruling parties has had a ‘snowball’ effect. Another interesting finding in the study is that, privately, women in these opposition parties are envious of women in the ruling parties and privately support quotas, although they would not say so openly. The opposition parties hold on to the argument that quotas lead to tokenism, but offer little to support their viewpoint.

In South Africa, Democratic Alliance (DA) Chief Whip Douglas Gibson said that, in contrast to the ANC, which has many women ‘passengers’, the DA (with 12 percent women members of parliament (MPs)) is making a conscious effort to recruit ‘quality’ women to the national legislature. Former ANC Deputy Secretary-General Thenjiwe Mtintso points out that, to the extent that the DA is ‘head hunting’, this in itself is an example of a special measure. And to the extent that DA women are hand-picked, Gibson conceded that the ‘majority of DA women perform better than DA men’.

ANC officials claim that there is no evidence to support Gibson’s contention that the majority of ANC women are simply there because of the quota. According to the Minister in the South African Presidency responsible for gender, Essop Pahad, while the ANC list had to be adjusted in the 1994 elections to ensure that the 30 percent target was met, this did not happen in 1999.

Mtintso refers to the way in which many ANC female parliamentarians improved their position on the ANC list between the 1994 and 1999 elections (see table below) as evidence of the fact that, once in parliament, women have gained acceptance and credibility in their own right.³

Some of these changes are dramatic. For example, former Minister of Health and now Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nkosozana Zuma, moved from ninety-ninth to third on the list, and there is frequent speculation that she could be the first female vice president of South Africa. In interviews, ANC politicians have spoken about how they have learned on the job, gained confidence, and brought a different approach to governance.

When the ANC asked Lydia Kompe, an activist with the Rural Women's Movement (RWM) to become an MP in 1994, for instance, she responded: 'Parliament needs people who are educated, who can understand bills and laws, high profile people. I was honest [enough] with myself to say I can't take on something I can't manage'.

She found, however, that many men were as confused as her. She thus chose committees that she could relate to, such as the land committee, and, as a result, soon found her feet and her voice. Widely regarded as one of South Africa's most hard working and effective MPs, Kompe is highlighted in the study as an example of the difference that the life experiences of women can bring to law making, as well as to making governance more responsive.

The South African experience shows how debates within the ruling party on quotas did more than get more women into decision-making structures. They were also a turning point for many men. ANC MP Mapetjane Kgaogelo Lekgoro recalls that: 'In debating the issue I got persuaded. I came to accept the wisdom of the quota. The mere fact of a sizeable number of women makes you realise that women are capable. I saw it unfold before my eyes. Women, wherever they were given responsibility, performed as well as men. It sharpens your outlook. It changes the narrow view that you had about women in the broader society. It opens your horizons. More and more you come to respect women as equals'.

While the PR system coupled with voluntary party quotas is no doubt a powerful formula for increasing the representation of women and ensuring their effective participation, it is not without its limitations.

During a civil society focus group meeting, political scientist and gender activist Shireen Hassim noted: 'I am not yet ready to change my mind about the PR system; it has delivered a lot. But we must also think about costs. What we have not done is look enough at party policies, and the other landscape issues in which we are making this argument for the PR system'.

Pahad notes that the ANC has a system of deployment of MPs to constituencies, and rejects the argument that the PR system lacks accountability: 'If accountability is reduced to where you come from, then accountability has little to say for itself. If we are serious about accountability, as we are in the ANC, we are accountable to the country as a whole. When we get sent to constituencies, it is to localise the work and give it specific tasks'.

Pahad points to MPs like Kompe, who is constantly pleading for more time in her constituency, as an example of the fact that the PR system does not necessarily mean weaker links between people and politicians.

Civil society organisations involved in the Fifty-Fifty campaign in South Africa contend that a combination of a legislated quota of 50 percent and the PR system both at the

national and local levels (see later section) would deliver a world first: gender parity in the South African parliament.

Pahad supports a 30 percent legislated quota at the national level, and is reluctant about a straight PR system at the local level. He said that the constituency system, or some form of it, is critical in local government: 'You need it because by its very nature local is local. You need a system where the local community has a direct contact'.

Voluntary Quotas in the PR system at the local level

Local government in Namibia comes closest to the activist's 'dream' of a combination of a legislated quota, a voluntary party quota (in SWAPO's zebra system where one woman is placed after one man on its lists) and a PR system. With 42 percent women in local councils in Namibia, it has certainly led to a ringing up of the numbers.

The study found many examples of women who entered decision-making structures via this system and have made a qualitative difference to local governance. Theresa Samaria, for instance, spoke movingly about how she had never aspired to be anything more than a 'housewife'. Because of the SWAPO quota, however, she went on to become the country's first black and first female mayor of Walvis Bay. Under her auspices, this troubled enclave, which South Africa only handed over to Namibia four years after independence, developed into a thriving regional port. Samaria also did much to integrate the poor 'squatter' neighbourhoods into the municipality, an effort that later earned her an award from Habitat, the United Nations (UN) agency responsible for human settlements.

But the study also found examples of local councils that appeared to be distant from their communities. Windhoek City Council, for example, is probably one of the only city councils in Africa with a majority (two thirds) of women. It is also, by any standards, a well-run council. Yet, in focus groups, residents complained that they did not know the councillors and that it is difficult to determine any distinctive contribution made by the women councillors.

The study includes a case study of the Keetmanshoop municipality in the south of Namibia. This is fascinating because the three ruling party councillors are all women, while the three opposition councillors and one independent councillor are all men. The independent councillor, who holds the sway vote, began with the SWAPO councillors but jumped ship when controversial issues like restructuring the administration and privatisation of water and electricity came onto the agenda. The council is frequently in deadlock and mired in controversy. What is interesting in both the Windhoek and Keetmanshoop case studies is the extent to which residents blamed the PR system for their sense of alienation from councillors.

Association of Local Authorities (ALAN) Director Lister Chaka acknowledged: 'Accountability has been a real problem for us. You are electing a party, so how do you hold that individual accountable, especially with mismanagement of resources? At present, this comes from political structures, rather than from the bottom'. He added that, in so far as women are most prevalent in local government in Namibia, these negative perceptions affect their ability to be effective at the local level. However, SWAPO has argued for the retention of the PR system at the local level because of the

legacies of apartheid that, in a constituency system, would lead to racially divided councils.

Quotas and reserved seats

The research did not include Tanzania as a case study, but the researchers had the opportunity to conduct interviews with a few key stakeholders there. The limited fieldwork highlighted some concerns about the ramifications of reserving seats for women under the constituency system.

The 20 percent of seats that are reserved for women under the Tanzanian constitution are distributed between parties on a proportional basis. Only 2.3 percent of women in the assembly have entered politics as a result of contesting seats in the main constituency-based elections.

According to Anna Makinda, Chairperson of the Tanzania Women's Parliamentary Group (TWPG), this has created a hierarchy among female politicians, with those who contested the elections being more highly regarded than those who gained 'special seats'.

However, the TWPG is making the best of the provision by offering on-the-job training to those female MPs who acquired 'special seats' so that they can stand in constituency elections in 2005.

Quotas and mixed systems

The dilemmas of women MPs in Tanzania echo those of local councillors in South Africa, where there is a mixed PR and constituency system, and where the largest proportion of women have entered politics on the back of the ANC's 50 percent quota for women on the PR seats.

In interviews, local councillors in South Africa have highlighted a number of ways in which PR councillors are practically disadvantaged. Some of their comments are outlined below.

- ❑ Ward councillors have offices and administrative support, whereas PR councillors do not.
- ❑ Initially, ward councillors received different financial rewards and benefits; this has been standardised after some campaigning.
- ❑ Ward councillors constitute and automatically chair ward committees that are the direct contact point with communities.
- ❑ The views of ward councillors are sought on important strategic issues, such as re-zoning applications, whereas those of PR councillors are not.
- ❑ PR councillors do a lot of the backroom work, without the same resources and without getting credit for it. As one woman councillor has put it: 'This does not mean that you do not get involved, but you are not as visible. All councillors should be equal and get down to the dirty work'.

However, councillors had no easy answers to the constraints of electoral systems. Rehana Moosajee of Johannesburg City Council summed up the dilemma regarding electoral systems as follows: 'The PR system has been important in facilitating access by women and minority parties. But if we go for a straight PR system, we would have an

accountability problem. I think we need both, to deepen democracy. But we need to see how we bring more women in on the ward lists’.

Conclusion

The conclusion to be drawn from the parts of the study that relate to the qualitative aspects of quotas is that there is no simple solution to the issue of quotas and electoral systems. However, there are some principles worth drawing out. Some of these are outlined below.

- ❑ Constituency systems on their own will simply not deliver rapid increases in female representation.
- ❑ While PR systems may have certain disadvantages with regard to accountability, they help to ensure the inclusion of marginalised groups, including women and minority parties.
- ❑ As noted by Pahad, accountability is not only a matter of geography, which parties can overcome via deployment mechanisms. Indeed, the study offers examples of MPs in Mozambique and South Africa who have been assigned constituency duties, are well known in their constituencies, and clearly take accountability seriously.
- ❑ Short of changing to a PR system, countries with a constituency system could look at the option pursued by Tanzania of reserving seats for women via a constitutional or legislated quota to be distributed among parties on a PR basis.
- ❑ Mixed systems, such as the one in Tanzania, and local government in South Africa raise the possibility of the PR system becoming a way for women to enter politics and then to contest constituency elections.

Endnotes

¹ Defined as ‘the point at which women, through a combination of numerical strength, enabling political environments, empowerment and conviction feel able to raise critical questions in mainstream environments’.

² The study will be launched on 10 December 2003. For more information visit www.genderlinks.org.za.

³ Mtintso, Thenjiwe. 1999. ‘Women in Decision Making: A Conceptual Framework’. In *Women in Politics and Decision Making in SADC: Beyond 30% in 2005*, SADC Gender Unit. p. 45.