



Experiences, lessons and good practices in promoting gender equality in politics in Africa

- **EISA'S 9TH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM -**
Concept note

1. INTRODUCTION

EISA will organise its ninth annual symposium on 11-12 December 2014, in Johannesburg, South Africa, to share experiences, harness lessons, and examine good practices regarding gender equality and participation of men and women in politics in Africa. The symposium will primarily focus on how to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, particularly in relation to electoral processes, parliaments, political parties, and within Election Management Bodies. It will provide a platform for dialogue and exchange between election practitioners, members of parliament, representatives of political parties, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), continental organisations, as well as Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and academics.

This symposium presents a valuable opportunity to take stock of two decades of identifiable trends, challenges and results achieved across countries, national processes and institutions in support of enhanced women's participation in the political arena. It is timely, particularly on the eve of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, and will contribute to informing strategies and approaches towards more effective post-2015 overarching gender equality goals in the African continent. Lastly, the EISA's ninth annual symposium offers an opportunity to reflect on the achievements and opportunities for women's leadership and political participation in the lead up to the 20-year review and commemoration of the Beijing Platform for Action to take place in 2015, and its Critical Area G on 'Women, Power and Decision-making.'

2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Significant gains have been achieved regarding women's access to political institutions over the past two decades in Africa. More women now assume positions in national parliaments and there seems to be a wider consensus that building sustainable democratic regimes require that women are given the same opportunities as men to fully participate in all aspects of decision-making. According to the 2013 United Nations' Millennium Development Goals Report, while the average share of female parliamentarians worldwide was only around 20% in 2013, the highest electoral gains for women were recorded in three countries using legislative quotas for the first time. These include two African countries, namely Senegal where women occupy 43% of parliamentary seats, and Algeria with its 32% female representation in parliament, the first and only Arab country to date to have surpassed the 30% target. In 2014, Angola, Mozambique, Rwanda, the Seychelles, Tanzania, South Africa, and Uganda were amongst the 25 nations in the world with at least 35 percent women in

parliament, with Rwanda leading the way with a majority of women in parliament. Sub-Saharan Africa also ranks 4th on the sub-index of the 2013 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index just before North America and Middle East and North Africa. According to the International Parliamentary Union (IPU 2014), Africa has the second world highest percentage of women ministers (20%) behind the Americas (22 %) and before Europe (18%). These statistics largely represent incremental improvements in women's participation in political spheres, rather than an accelerated push towards eliminating gender-based disparities in politics on the continent. As the 2015 target date for reaching the Millennium Development Goals approaches, the average proportion of women in parliament in Sub-Saharan Africa is 22.5 percent as of January 2014, with only 11 countries having reached the 30 percent target. Progress is uneven from one sub-region to another and from one country to another. While the Southern African Development Community (SADC) requires that 50 percent of decision making positions should be occupied by women by 2015, only South Africa and the Seychelles are currently above 40 percent. In East Africa, the disparity ranges from 63.8 percent in the Parliament of Rwanda, to 19.1 percent in Kenya, and 13.8 percent in Somalia (IPU 2014).

There is unfortunately significantly less data available on women's participation in other areas of public life, including at the local level and in the judiciary, although available data also suggest women remain under-represented in these areas. In terms of electoral management, few data indicators are disaggregated by sex aside from voter registration. More needs to be done to ensure that all forms of women's participation are measured – from voter turnout to staffing levels in EMBs to election observers and party agents – to provide a broader range of indicators aside from women's parliamentary representation, which has been the single measure over the past 20 years.

Women, representation and political participation

The different levels of women's legislative representation, and its geographic variation, reflects social, cultural, and political obstacles facing African women in accessing political institutions as well socio-economic opportunities. Beyond looking at numbers, women's political integration should move beyond merely increasing their involvement in decision making positions to ensuring their substantive contributions to the institutions in which they take part. While the proportion of seats held by women in parliaments is a positive step towards closing the gender "representation gap" in many societies, increasing women's participation in decision making processes should not be limited to their number and role as parliamentarians. In other words, women representation in politics should be both quantitative and qualitative.

Assessing gender equality through the representation lens is about the extent to which women are able to run for, hold and meaningfully contribute to political and other offices. There is still a long way to move from a focus on boosting women's "representation" and consider how to bolster substantive representation and ensure the inclusion of women's perspectives and experiences into the decision-making process.

It is therefore necessary to review recent trends in increasing women's involvement in politics and discuss issues and challenges underpinning existing efforts and strategies and to address barriers to equal participation and representation of men and women in the political arena in Africa. A wide spectrum of measures, activities, policies, and approaches, has been developed by various stakeholders to increase the level of involvement of women in decision-

making. However the extent to which all these initiatives have been translated into tangible results and concrete achievements varies across countries, and is also contingent upon the type of processes and institutions assessed, including EMBs, political parties, and national parliaments.

3. OBJECTIVES

The EISA's ninth annual symposium will seek to:

- Take stock of existing trends and practices in increasing women's involvement in politics in Africa;
- Interrogate various issues and challenges underpinning efforts and strategies aimed at addressing barriers to equal participation and representation of men and women in the political arena on the continent;
- Identify tangible results and concrete achievements in increasing the level of involvement of women in decision-making processes and institutions;
- Assess the role played by elections, political parties and the institution of parliament towards eliminating barriers to equal political representation and participation in Africa and interrogate approaches and strategies devised by various stakeholders to promote gender equality in these institutions and processes;
- Share and document cross-national and regional experiences as well as best practices to achieving gender equality in participation during elections, within political parties, and in Parliament.
- Consider innovative ways in which Member States measure (and track progress towards) women's leadership and political participation in the post-2015 development agenda.

4. PROGRAMMES AND EXPECTED OUTPUTS

The above objectives will be met through the holding of plenary sessions for participants to share national and comparative case studies and experiences. Each presentation will revolve around main national or regional trends in promoting equal political participation of men and women, highlight main challenges and achievements, as well as draw key lessons learnt and recommend best practices regarding gender equality in elections, political parties and parliament.

The symposium will be opened by a keynote address from an eminent African personality chosen for his/her scholarship, political and/or symbolic role in enhancing gender equality on the continent.

Papers will be distributed during the workshop and will be considered for publication after the symposium.

5. TARGET PARTICIPANTS

Participants to the EISA's ninth annual symposium will be drawn from Election Management Bodies, political parties, CSOs, election observer groups, continental institutions and RECs, national parliaments, universities and research institutions, as well as international donor agencies.

6. DRAFT AGENDA

DAY 1:

SESSION 1: OFFICIAL OPENING

SESSION 2: GENDER EQUALITY IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: BENCHMARKS, TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

SESSION 3: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE: THE CASE OF ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODIES

SESSION 4: ASSESSING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION ACROSS THE ELECTORAL CYCLE

SESSION 5: GAINING OR GAMING? ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF ELECTORAL REFORMS ON GENDER EQUALITY

END OF DAY ONE

DAY 2:

SESSION 6: GATE-KEEPERS, GATE-CLOSERS, OR GATE-OPENERS? GENDER EQUALITY IN POLITICAL PARTIES

SESSION 7: WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT: BETWEEN PRESENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS IN DECISION-MAKING

SESSION 8: WHAT HAPPENS ONCE THERE? LEARNING FROM WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS