

'WHY PARTICIPATE IN ELECTIONS IF WE'RE NOT PROPERLY REPRESENTED?'¹

Women's political participation and representation in SADC countries

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ABSTRACT

Increased democratisation in Southern Africa might suggest that gender equality no longer matters in the politics of countries in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. Yet the political participation and representation of women remains controversial owing to gender stereotypes, rhetoric, tokenism and patriarchy. Critically examining the political processes in the SADC region, specifically elections, gender and women's role in a democracy, the article acknowledges progressive legislation and some 'successes' in a few countries in the region, but contends that the situation of women in the politics of these countries remains unsatisfactory and that it requires political will and collective action to ensure substantive participation and representation in governance processes. Based on a literature review, data analysis and theoretical postulations about women's political participation and representation, the article argues that much more needs to be done in this regard. To understand the hurdles women face in politics in the SADC region, especially political party rhetoric and patriarchy, the author explores a few theories, including the Ubuntu philosophy, and revisits the debates over women's quotas in political parties to improve participation and representation. The conclusion suggests measures for empowering women candidates and political party members, while urging women to show more interest in politics, particularly elections.

1 The title of this article was inspired by the comments of some women political candidates during South Africa's 2009 national and provincial elections.

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INTRODUCTION

Increasing women's participation in politics and securing their access to political life is of particular importance to democratic development and sustainability. Efforts to promote and increase women's political participation have been made all around the world and have brought together women from different political, social and cultural groups with the common aim of reaching the goal of gender equality.

IDEA 2005, p 18

Observers argue that '[a] plethora of literature exists validating the argument that the African continent has been undergoing a major democratic wave since the 1990s (Matlosa 2003, p 4, citing Ake 1996 and 2000, Hyslop 1999, Reynolds 1999, UNDP 2002, Bratton & Van de Walle 1997, Huntington 1991, Bujra & Adejumobi 2002 and Bujra & Buthelezi 2002). How this democratisation has benefited women's political participation and representation and access to decision-making positions in the legislatures and political parties in Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries is unclear.

Probably the political participation and representation of women in Africa matters much more today than it did a few decades ago, when many African countries attained political independence (EISA 2010). These countries subsequently adopted liberal democracy as their preferred system for attaining power or removing individuals from power through elections. Such participation and representation generate intense debates and interest among the region's parties, civil society and women's organisations for several reasons.

Firstly, women's access to franchise rights evokes forceful public debates globally, as such rights have been granted comparatively recently and some countries struggle to grant women full franchise rights despite mounting international pressure from women's and human rights organisations.

Secondly, excluding women from the franchise violates the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Convention on Human Rights, the African Human Rights Charter, the 2008 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG 2007), all of which promote equal participation for women in the democratisation of Africa.

This author shares the view that '[t]here are as many definitions of democracy as there are writers on the subject', including the one that defines it as '... a political system that allows citizens to freely choose their government over time through fair elections; a system that accords adequate participation in national affairs ...' (Matlosa 2005, p 3). The ACDEG (ch 2 art 2, p 11) recognises that women's

participation in Africa's democratic processes promotes 'gender balance and equality in the governance and development processes' and supports 'universal suffrage as the inalienable right of the people' (Article 4.2).

Recently, SADC heads of government signed a Declaration on Gender and Development which recommends 'affirmative action measures with particular reference to women', including 'the achievement of a target of at least 30 per cent women in political and decision-making structures by year 2005' (EISA 2010, p 1). This target was increased to 'at least fifty per cent women in decision-making positions by 2015' when the Protocol on Gender and Development was adopted on 17 August 2008 (EISA 2010, p 1).

Thirdly, given Africa's recent democratisation trajectory, almost the whole world is becoming increasingly disturbed by countries in which women lack the full franchise and basic human rights, despite countless international resolutions on gender equality. Swaziland is probably among the few countries in Africa whose conservative traditional practices still undermine such rights. Women are prevented from being appointed to top public positions, although the country's Constitution allows them to vote. However, women were recently barred from nominating candidates or from standing as candidates if they were wearing 'trousers, shorts or mini-skirts at nomination centres' (makeeverywomancount.org 2013). Elsewhere in the world, the situation raises concerns as observers note that

[t]oday only a few countries do not extend suffrage to women, or extend only limited suffrage. In Bhutan there is only one vote per family in village-level elections. In Lebanon women have to have proof of education before they vote. In Oman, only 175 people chosen by the government, mostly male, vote, and Kuwait only in 2005 granted women the right to vote in the 2007 elections. Some countries, like Saudi Arabia, which have denied the vote to men as well as women, recently opened the vote in provisional elections to men.

Women in World History Curriculum 1996-2012

Fourthly, in many countries in the SADC region, although women participated side by side with men in liberation, anti-colonialist and anti-apartheid struggles, especially in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania and South Africa, the patriarchal nature of some liberation and nationalist movements (Hassim 2006, p 98; Geisler 2004, p 69) undermined gender equality.

In South Africa's case analysts argue that 'there is a lot that we don't know about what happened in the trenches [ie, liberation war camps]'. They insist that women faced unequal sexual power relations because sometimes '... [men] felt entitled to have sexual relations with [female colleagues ... during the struggle]'

(Gasa eNCA interview 2013). Geisler (2004, p 69) concurs that during South Africa's liberation struggle some '[male] comrades generally "took a dim view" of women challenging gender stereotypes...'

Probably inevitably, once these countries achieved political independence they began to vacillate over substantive gender equality issues. Gradually they overlooked the importance of equality, while covertly or blatantly violating the provisions of the global instruments and this trivialised women's crucial contribution to their countries' struggles.

The following significant phenomena and global instruments highlight women's unequal political position in society and help to identify weaknesses pertaining to women's political participation and representation:

- The wave of democratisation in Africa;
- The eight Millennium Development Goals, one of which emphasises gender rights
- International pressure on governments to implement the provisions of the CEDAW and the UN Declaration on Human Rights.

These instruments and global initiatives challenged patriarchal behaviour and attitudes, urging governments to implement gender equality. Given the dominance of males in contemporary Africa (despite the occasional passage of progressive legislation), some men have frequently perpetrated violence and have promoted instability and wars. Thus, women politicians and gender activists believe women's leadership to be superior to that of men (Ramphela 2013).

According to Mamphela Ramphela, a prominent South African woman politician who formed a new political party, Agang, in June 2013, women's attributes include humility, respect and dignity. The formation of another woman-led party may change South Africa's politics, although its prospects in the 2014 elections cannot be prophesied.

Both female and male gender activists continually challenge patriarchy, to which they attribute women's marginalisation in society. Thus, a prominent ANC leader recently criticised women's reluctance to contest their party's presidency (Mtintso 2012, p 21), asking: 'Why do women do a disappearing act when it is time for nominations for the highest office?'

The absence of a 'women's lobby group, even one from the ANCWL [ANC Women's League]' and the fact that '[t]he ANC is a patriarchal organisation' (Mtintso 2012, p 21) were possible reasons. Further, in South Africa, '[a]s early as the 1900s, women (especially Black Africans) took the state to task by opposing what they criticised as undemocratic and repressive tendencies that, among others, denied them their franchise rights through the pass law system' (Maphunye 2008,

p 4; ANC 2013). In some cases they openly defied the apartheid 'system', as they did in 1956 with their Women's March to Pretoria to protest the pass laws at a time when black women had no franchise rights (ANC 2013).

Elsewhere in Africa, Liberia's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Malawi's Joyce Banda have taken over the highest position in their countries, becoming the first women heads of state in Africa. Women have also been very vocal in national parliaments and in the Pan-African Parliament and in 2013 South Africa's Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma was elected chair of the African Union Commission.

The article does not treat women as a homogenous group – they differ in age, race, ethnicity, religion, colour, class, those who are politically vocal and active and those who are not, and, broadly, according to socio-economic status. These dynamics are acknowledged but are understood from a gender perspective. This perspective entails careful analysis of women's and men's behavioural, attitudinal and interaction patterns, especially in terms of access to power, where such power is located, who benefits, how, where, and when. A gender perspective may help explain what enhances or undermines women's political participation and representation in SADC.

This introduction is followed by an outline of the assumptions, approach and methodology of the article. It then moves on to conceptualise and problematise women's political participation and representation; assesses the implications of the relevant data for women's participation and representation in politics in the region; the key challenges women in SADC countries face with regard to such participation and representation; women's role in electoral democracy and, finally, observations on gender, participation and representation through elections; followed by the conclusion and recommendations.

ASSUMPTIONS, APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The analysis in this article of women's political participation and representation in countries in the SADC region rests on the following assumptions:

- Gender inequality remains problematic and undermines the recent political strides made by women through democratic elections.
- Unequal participation and representation in politics in the SADC region undermines women's contribution as liberation fighters, voters, party supporters and campaigners.
- Patriarchy in countries in the region weakens women's political advancement through elections, including their quest for substantive equality with men. This results in rhetoric on public platforms by (mostly male) leaders with minimal commitment to gender equality.

In addition, the following working hypothesis guided the analysis: Women's increasing political participation and representation in SADC countries will increase their visibility, amplify their voice and enhance democracy in the region.

This hypothesis was not tested but merely used as a guideline to analyse the literature and secondary data. The article posits that women's political participation and representation in SADC countries can best be understood using analysis underpinned by the following factors:

The author examined the relevant literature and formulated theoretical conceptualisations and assumptions and used desktop research to assess women's role in politics in countries in the region. This assessment was complemented by relevant statistics where possible. The analysis is supported by the author's previous research into gender issues, women and bureaucracy and power and politics in Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

As gender issues permeate several disciplines the author examined theories of democracy, game theory, systems theory, rational choice theory, democratic consolidation and the Ubuntu African philosophical viewpoint. Women's political participation and representation inevitably also touch on gender issues, which are normally better articulated from a gender and feminist perspective, as discussed below.

Theoretically, women may be assumed to belong to a 'system' (political, economic, social, and so on) which affects their individual or collective participation and representation. Thus, an examination of the nature of the political system and the organisation of political competition (Goetz & Hassim 2003, p 48) may help to explain power dynamics in society that may impede women's political participation and representation. Likewise, the values and beliefs of the Ubuntu philosophy may help to elucidate attitudinal, behavioural and institutional factors to explain why there is better political participation and representation of women in some countries than in others.

Theories of democracy seek to explain the characteristics of democracy, broadly defined, and often describe the actors, systems, structures, processes and phenomena that promote or negate the establishment and persistence of democracy in particular countries. Theories of democracy and democratic consolidation also help with the analysis of individual or group behaviour in elections, political campaigns and the recruitment and appointment of women to political positions. Women's political participation and representation can be explained in terms of at least two basic variants or models of democracy, namely, direct or participatory democracy and liberal or representative democracy (Held 1993, p 15).

As an interest or pressure group women may influence policy-making as voters or party supporters, or when they elect representatives or stand for office

as party candidates and hence affect the political process meaningfully. Matlosa (2004, p 9) argues that

[i]n a representative democracy, citizens are governed by their representatives who are regularly subjected to periodic review through general and local government elections that either renew the mandate of the representatives or change such leadership through the ballot and not the bullet.

Similarly, theories of democratic consolidation analyse how democracy is entrenched and how far countries move from authoritarian rule to some form of democratic regime (Schedler 1998, p 91). Increased numbers of women participating in elections and being represented in public positions would thus suggest a significant role in the democratic process, all other variables remaining constant.

Game theory and rational choice theory can both assist in analysing political phenomena. Rational choice theory '... considers the rational decisions that the electorate makes in weighing up the costs and benefits of voting' and election management bodies would do well to '... reduce the costs of registering and voting by making procedures more efficient and effective and thereby increase turnout' (Roberts, Struwig & Grossberg 2012, p 9). In terms of gender, this may require applying gender sensitive measures in voter education, capturing gender disaggregated election data and ensuring that party messages promote gender equality. Norris (2004, cited in Roberts Struwig & Grossberg 2012, p 9) suggests that

the primary incentives for citizens to vote in elections relate to the costs of registering and voting, time and effort required to register and vote, the party choices available to voters and the degree to which casting a ballot determines the composition of Parliament and government.

Game theory sometimes develops models wherein elections are viewed as a game of winners and losers and election laws are seen as the 'rules of the game'. This would help to indicate what would happen should a woman voter or candidate contravene such 'rules'. It may also help in assessing voters' behaviour during elections as part of game-theoretic models on voting (Blais 2000 cited in Feddersen & Sandroni 2006, p 1271).

Game theory might analyse participation and representation as a kind of 'game', whose 'rules' determine who wins or loses. Circumstantial evidence from

SADC elections and parties suggests that some men perceive such 'rules of the game' to be favourably inclined towards them, given male dominance in regional legislative, executive and judiciary structures (author's informal discussions with some SADC observers during Zimbabwe's 2013 elections, Harare, 31 August 2013).

Participation and representation may also be explained as a 'rational' exercise wherein individuals seek to maximise their choices based on 'rational' thinking and behaviour as they rationalise possible roles to maximise their advantages while minimising the disadvantages. Rational choice theory and game theory help to identify the 'postulated preferences' (Ordershook 1986, p 15) or calculations voters make in deciding whether to vote for candidate A or B.

In terms of the argument in this article, such decisions may influence or be influenced by the voter's or candidate's gender. But intervening variables may sway a person's voting preference, as in the case where a woman voter avoids voting for a woman candidate for political or ideological reasons.

Systems theory may also assist in analysing the political role of women in countries in the region. It posits that all the actors in a polity may be understood as component parts of a 'system'. Thus, although women usually place unique demands on different polities they may be perceived as belonging to a system of actors such as youth, pensioners, voters, or a sub-system such as a traditional dance group, civil society, and so on, whose behaviour or thoughts somehow affect the 'system'.

Further, the author considers the relevance of African value systems, using the Ubuntu philosophy to explain gender imbalances and inequality in SADC countries. Such values include: '*Motho ke motho ka batho/ umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' (Mbigi 1997, p 2) (Sotho/Nguni), literally, 'a person becomes a person through other people'. One wonders how women's political participation and representation is of relevance to such value and cultural systems; whether and to what extent they accommodate the equal political participation and representation of women. Granted, each country will probably show different dynamics owing to its unique cultural practices, but the idea is to examine how African philosophy tackles gender equality, especially in terms of power or access to power.

The author also examines the effect of official policy and party regulations in some countries on women's participation and representation through elections, especially the relevance of feminist theories to this analysis. Feminist theories (particularly liberal feminism) seek to explain women's political participation and representation (or lack of it) in decision-making positions.

Gender perspectives and feminism are critical to debates over and analysis of women's political participation and representation, especially in Africa (Phillips 1991; Geisler 2004; Hassim 2006; Hicks 2011; Murray 2013; True 2013). This is

particularly true given Hassim's observation, in her study of South African women's organisations, that 'undercurrents of feminism seethed beneath the surface of women's political activities' (Hassim 2006, pp 34-5). The gender perspective particularly helps in an analysis of women's political participation and representation because 'gender challenges all our political perspectives, forcing us to examine each position and concept afresh' (Phillips 1991, p 2).

As various scholars note: 'A strong body of feminist literature has been concerned with the ways in which representative democracy might be enhanced to ensure women's equal participation' (Phillips 1991; Young 1990). This literature has shown that, for women citizens in most democracies, there is a problem of both representation and accountability (Goetz & Hassim 2003, p 85).

Scholars who study politics from a feminist perspective and attempt to explain women's political participation and representation have found that, '[w]ith the odd exception, the entire debate on democracy has proceeded for centuries as if women were not there' (Phillips 1991, p 2). In Africa, typical examples include past calls by some Southern African liberation movements for 'one man, one vote', which implied that franchise rights apply only to men.

Feminism has exposed

[t]he low numbers of women in office even in established democracies (such as the USA, where participation in Congress only recently inched close to the global average). This has led feminists to conclude that the exclusion of women is not just a 'deficit' of democracy but is indicative of fundamentally gendered conditions for political participation which are 'intrinsic to politics, not an extraneous, additional concern'.

Goetz & Hassim 2003, 49, citing Phillips 1993, p 98

Its advantages notwithstanding, it is acknowledged that '[f]eminism is not a coherent ideology, nor is its usage uncontentious among organizations committed to gender equality' (Hassim 2006, p 35).

Liberal feminism, particularly, was considered to be a tool of analysis as it is usually a common point of reference for what earlier literature on gender called 'women's national machineries', a reference to national departments and offices dealing with women's affairs or gender related matters (Gouws 2008). However, its main limitations are that it 'ignores the intersectionality of identities and how women of different classes and race groups (with specific reference to South Africa) are positioned with regard to level of education and possibilities of political participation (Gouws 2008, p 539).

CONCEPTUALISING AND PROBLEMATISING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN SADC COUNTRIES

The equitable political participation and representation of women remains critical to SADC's and Africa's success. But why should women participate and be represented equitably in the politics of SADC countries? How significant is such participation and representation in local and regional politics? Can such participation and representation determine women's fundamental role in politics and, specifically, in elections?

The answers to these questions may seem easy, but require systematic and comprehensive analysis focusing on women's positions in parliaments, governments, civil society organisations, election management bodies, community structures and political parties, among others. Such analysis is, however, beyond the scope of this article, which concentrates on the situation of women with regard to elections and electoral democracy.

However, the discussion alludes to representation in the above-mentioned institutions, while highlighting women's overt political roles in such institutions. The analysis concurs with the view that for women in SADC and globally, '[p]articipation through elections and, where applicable, through referendums must therefore be respected, protected and fulfilled as a human right' (European Commission 2007, p 30).

According to Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf:

Women's presence in parliaments around the world is a reality that is impacting on the social, political and economic fabric of nations and of the world. Yet, their access to these important legislative structures, learning how to work within them, and the extent to which they impact on and through them, remain serious challenges ... A concerted effort is needed to target all stages of women's political participation, from the moment they decided that they want to run for public office, through each step till they reach that designated office, and thereafter to ensure that as members of parliaments, they have the means and needed resources to impact positively and constructively on the advancement of their nation.

IDEA 2005, p 13

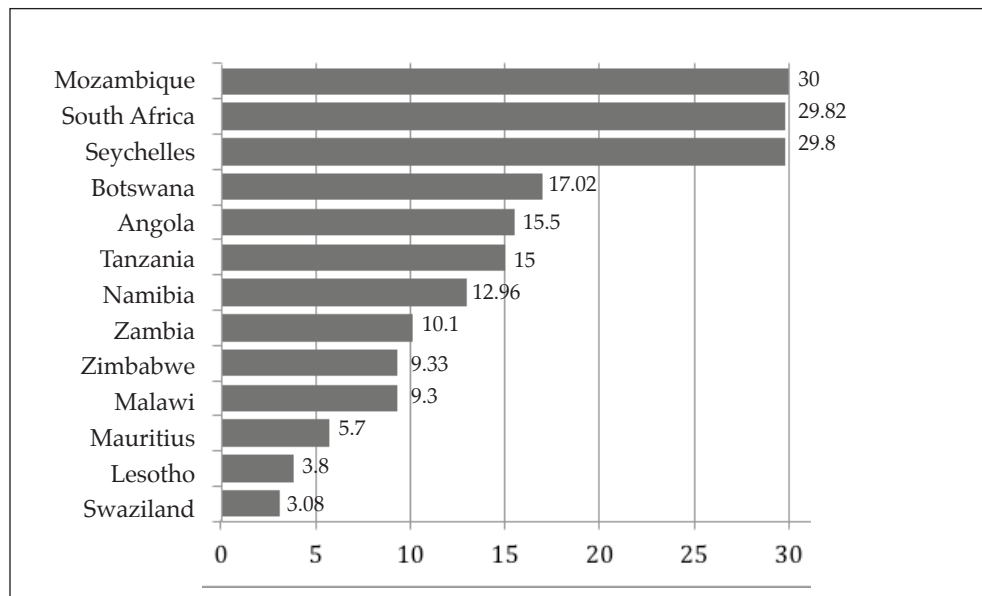
Others note that '[g]ender barriers in the [Southern African] region limit women's participation in governance and decision-making, and hence reinforce power gaps' (Akinboade 2005, p 259). Evidence reveals 'a very worrying picture of women's participation in politics and public office' in some SADC countries (Mandiyani 2012, p 86).

To problematise and understand such barriers one needs to analyse the myriad cultural norms and values that determine women's roles in SADC societies. In a manner that many women in the region might identify with, Yoon & Bunwaree (2008, p 17) describe the barriers to women's legislative representation in Mauritius.

These include '[a] low level of women's activism within political parties, an electoral system unfavourable to women, discriminatory nomination practices, coalition politics, the male-dominant culture, the lack of financial resources for women, and a gender specific education'. Similarly, elsewhere in the world women experience serious hurdles which impede their franchise rights. Recently, in an article entitled 'First woman to run for elections', the *Guardian* (1 April 2013) reported that '[f]or most women in Pakistan's war-torn and ultra-conservative frontier region, casting a vote in an election is an impossible dream, let alone standing as a candidate.'

While some countries seemingly promote the political participation and representation of women others remain 'neutral' and still others proscribe women's 'encroachment' into the hallowed seats of power and influence by limiting (overtly or covertly) women's social roles; hence the use of patronising terms like 'Mother of the Nation', or 'Queen Mother'.

Figure 1
Women in Parliament in the SADC region in 2002



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union Website

The fundamental problem in many societies that undergirds women's participation and representation in elections and therefore in politics is access to power and resources and control thereof. Many justifications for why women cannot ascend to the highest thrones rest on this reality and are particularly relevant as African countries increasingly adopt liberal democracy as a political system of choice.

Yet, some scholars have 'argued strongly that African states do not need liberal democracy but would rather adopt social democracy or what others refer to as developmental democracy, which, compared to liberal democracy, is more participative, inclusive, representative, accountable and developmentally social welfarist' (Matlosa 2005, pp 6-7, citing Ake 1996, 2000; Lumumba-Kasongo 2002; Matlosa 2002). The context of women's participation and representation in politics and decision-making positions in SADC countries should thus take cognisance of this reality.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN ELECTIONS IN THE SADC REGION

The above data suggest that a decade ago women in the SADC region enjoyed a considerable amount of participation and representation in their region's politics, especially in Mozambique, South Africa and the Seychelles. It seems that countries with larger populations do better than those with smaller populations, possibly because of population size and type of electoral system.

Overall, women in the region encounter serious hurdles in terms of political participation and representation, particularly in Lesotho and Swaziland, which have the lowest numbers. Yoon (2011, p 87) recognises some 'growth in women's legislative representation [which] has also positively affected parliamentary debates and atmosphere, attitudes toward women MPs, recruitment of women into parliament, and policy outcomes in Tanzania', but also notes 'a backlash' against the country's 'special-seat system for women'. In Malawi, where the percentage of women parliamentarians has reportedly 'grown steadily since 1994', 'the overall number remains low' and the '[p]olitical participation of women in rural Malawi is even lower' (Tiessen 2008, p 199, citing Phiri 2004, p 1 and Lowe-Morna 2002, p 8).

The data reflected in Figure 1 have implications for the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008), which promotes gender related equity and women's full representation in politics and national leadership structures and sets 23 progressive targets. Among the major targets are:

- For women to hold 50% of decision-making positions in the private and public sector by 2015;

- The revision, amendment and repeal by 2015 of all sex or gender-discriminatory laws;
- To ensure equal participation of women and men in economic policy formulation and implementation by 2015;
- The adoption of integrated approaches to reduce gender-based violence by half by 2015.

Sangonet 2011

In the discussions that led to the adoption of the protocol it was noted that

South Africa, which ironically has not yet signed the ratification instrument with the SADC secretariat, has the highest proportionate representation of women in Parliament at 45 percent. Mozambique is second (2nd) at 39.2 percent representation of women in Parliament; Angola is third (3rd) at 36.6 percent and the Republic of Tanzania is fourth at 36 percent.

Sangonet 2011

The Sangonet report continued:

Even though the progress by South Africa at national level is commended, the story at local level is still disappointing. Chief Electoral Officer, Pansy [sic] Tlakula, lamented imbalances at local government in South Africa's local government elections held in May 2011. In those elections, only 37 percent of the candidates were women, yet women constitute approximately 54 percent of the voters roll in South Africa. The results of the election revealed that of the successfully elected candidates, only 17.25 percent of women were women. Thus only one in every five councillors elected was a woman.

The situation in South Africa appears better than that in other SADC countries, but even there much still has to be done to improve the political participation and representation of women (Mtintso 2012, p 21).

KEY CHALLENGES

Like women in many parts of Africa those in the SADC region face unique challenges whenever they attempt to participate in elections and to be represented in national politics.

Rhetoric

The main challenge is the continual rhetoric of the mostly male political party leaders and representatives. This arises essentially as a result of the leaders' superficial commitment to gender equality within their parties.

'Ideally, all adult citizens, women and men, ought to have the rights to stand for election and to vote for a candidate or political party of their choice' (EISA 2010, p 217). Yet some party representatives and leaders seem reluctant to accept women as equals, merely paying lip service to gender equality issues while publicly suggesting that they support gender equality.

In South Africa, 'paying lip service to equity' undermines women's empowerment in the private sector too (Oakley-Smith, 2010). This probably explains the anomaly of many SADC countries having 'ratified conventions and treaties on women's rights', while failing to translate them into 'concrete deliverables for ... government participation and representation' (Mandiyani 2012, p 89).

This rhetoric is difficult to detect because even the 'women's wings' of the political parties sometimes try to conceal their leaders' vacillation or ambiguity over gender issues. Some have argued that '[n]o SADC country has achieved gender parity in parliament (the target set by the SADC Protocol for 2015' (Kadima & Booysen 2009, p 13) and it is possible to attribute this reality to party political and government rhetoric.

In some instances, women's participation and roles are 'largely tokenistic and marginal' (Hicks 2011, p 145). The attempts by some SADC countries to address women's under-representation in politics and elections are noteworthy. Among these attempts are Namibia's outreach programme on women and Malawi's '50-50 campaign', aimed at increasing women's political participation in decision-making, including efforts to make the electoral commission in the Democratic Republic of Congo gender representative (Kadima & Booysen 2009, pp 358, 235, 106). However, the rhetoric of parties and their leaders largely undermines progress and commitment to gender equality.

Deeply entrenched patriarchy?

Political parties in Africa, even those that are ideologically 'progressive', socialist or liberal democratic, have inherited the age-old practice of patriarchy and most parties in the SADC region are led by men. This situation persists despite the fact that women fought alongside men during the anti-colonial, anti-apartheid struggles in Angola, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and South Africa, performing largely similar roles (sometimes better than the men) (Hassim 2006, p 98).

Some, like Joice Mujuru (also known as Teurai Ropa Nhongo) of Zimbabwe have become influential and respected leaders. Yet the patriarchal nature of many liberation forces cannot be denied and 'women were constantly questioned about what [they] were doing in a man's world' (Hassim 2006, p 98, interview).

Despite the fact that women are gradually moving into leadership positions in some political parties, much still needs to be done to equalise their share of power, in the light of their contribution to these parties as liberation fighters, voters, campaigners and party organisers. Political parties in SADC countries need to continuously reform electoral systems to address overt or covert discrimination against women which results in a situation where, although the law provides for equal access to power, some party and government leaders do not have the political will to implement gender equity in participation and representation.

Patriarchy is reluctantly tackled in regional policy and other discourse and non-committal and indifferent attitudes often result in lack of implementation of the leaders' resolutions. Clearly, entrenched behavioural, attitudinal and institutional patriarchy threaten SADC's democracy and development and should be confronted through concerted, conscious and collective initiatives by civil society organisations and government.

Despite the role of political parties in empowering women in politics, '[s]tructurally, political parties often face disempowering electoral systems which work against the development of vibrant and stable multi-party electoral democracy' (Olaleye 2003, p 1). 'Although political parties [in SADC countries] profess to be democratic and decentralized in character, the practice in reality is to the contrary' (Olaleye 2003, p 2). Olaleye (2003, p 2) adds that '[t]he observable trend among political parties in the region is that of highly centralized organizations where all decisions come from the top downwards and their application is implemented and controlled by the rank and file.' For many women, this (usually male-dominated) centralisation poses a major obstacle to active participation and representation in politics and decision-making positions. 'Sexism accompanied by male-dominated conceptions of leadership and male-dominated political parties prevents women's full participations in political life' (EISA 2010, p 217).

At the behavioural level there are innumerable instances of women being undermined by social practices. In terms of elections, women candidates often face hostility, violence and threats of molestation if they dare challenge male candidates or campaign in so-called 'no-go areas'.

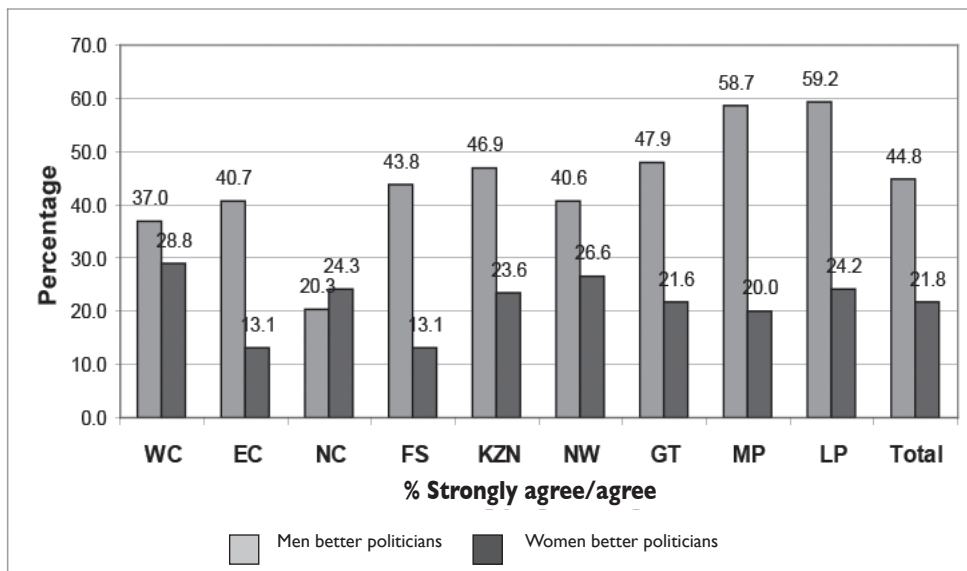
Sometimes parties insist on holding meetings or party gatherings at night, despite the fact that this may threaten the safety of women members and disadvantage those with family obligations. When women are unable to attend they are replaced by men in top positions during elections. In countries like

South Africa, where there is a 'high incidence of gender-based violence' (Vetten & Leisegang 2012, p 63), women politicians and candidates sometimes experience gender bias and abuse and are particularly vulnerable to violence. Not much seems to have changed since Randolph's comment in 1994, referring to South Africa's newly attained freedom: 'You are not free when you live in fear that you will be beaten or raped' (Randolph 1994, p 18).

As for attitudes, several negative beliefs, values and stereotypes are often used blatantly or covertly against women who dare challenge male hegemony: that they 'want to be men', are 'aggressive', and so on. These were some of the common public comments the author heard during election campaigns in the run-up to South Africa's 2009 national and provincial elections.

Such comments suggest deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes and undermine women's political participation and representation. In a nationwide survey carried out by the Human Sciences Research Council using a representative sample of about 4 000 respondents before South Africa's 2009 elections, participants were asked whether 'Men / Women are generally "better" politicians'. The results, surprisingly, suggested that South African voters' attitudes to women party leaders or candidates are strongly influenced by gender bias or masculinity. The majority in all nine provinces indicated that men were 'better' politicians (Figure 2).

Figure 2
'Men / Women are generally "better" politicians'
'Indicate the extent to which you agree with voting for a man or woman'



Source: IEC Voter Participation Survey 2008

While these findings may not apply to all SADC countries, they reflect the effects of gender bias on women's political participation and representation in the region.

In terms of institutions, some leadership styles, structures and rigid party rules are inimical to Ubuntu values and African cultural norms of respect, humility and political tolerance and undermine women's political participation and representation. Sometimes such institutions indirectly or unintentionally promote hostility towards women. Therefore, in South Africa and other SADC countries, the answer lies in 'changing the patriarchal nature of political governance structures and approaches to policy formulation and enabling diverse views and solutions to the many challenges besetting democracy and development' (Hicks & Buccus 2012, p 61).

Women's participation, representation and succession politics

Prominent women political leaders in Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa have been negatively affected by their countries' succession politics, whereby the incumbent most senior successor is traditionally a male. As Masina (2012, p 19) reports, in Malawi Joyce Banda was not President Bingu wa Mutharika's anointed successor – Mutharika wanted his brother Peter to take over and Banda was fired for 'insubordination' for refusing to 'endorse Peter Mutharika as the ruling party's candidate for the 2014 presidential elections'. In Zimbabwe, Joice Mujuru's situation is not dissimilar.

In South Africa, despite the presence of powerful women leaders in the governing African National Congress (ANC) and its 'alliance partners', the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the South African Communist Party, the outcome of the December 2012 ANC Mangaung National Conference left observers and citizens concerned when the ANC Women's League did not nominate a candidate to challenge the party's male leaders for the highest seat.

This is ironic, given the comment of Hicks (2011, p i36) that '[s]ince the first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa has made great strides in establishing a constitutional and legislative framework for building a participatory democracy'. Prominent gender activist and ANC leader Tenjiwe Mtintso (2012, p 21), puzzled at the dominance of men in her party, stated that 'the comrade brothers', that is, men,

have led us gloriously in the past century, but this is also a simple, even sad, reminder that in its 100 years, the ANC has never seen fit to elect a woman president. Has there never been a politically astute, capable, competent woman of integrity ready and willing to lead the ANC in one hundred years?

This situation seems to be common in the SADC region because, as Olaleye (2003, p 1) notes, '[s]tructurally, political parties often face the disempowering electoral systems and constitutional arrangements which work against the development of vibrant and stable multi-party electoral democracy' wherein we expect women to participate as equals.

ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY: THE ROLE OF WOMEN

For decades, gender and other activists have condemned women's unequal and relatively inferior position in society, have called for attitudinal change and have urged men to accept the inevitability of gender equality. Given that many post-colonial and former oppressive regimes were led by men (despite being regarded as 'progressive' in many respects), men were frequently responsible for the violence, coups d'état and unconstitutional changes of government, wars and general promotion of instability, disunity and conflict. Consequently, gender and human rights activists have, over the years, condemned these inequalities and some have called for new methods of candidate selection to ensure that women are chosen (Murray 2013, p 305).

How far does participatory democracy in the SADC region accommodate women?

Scholars, political scientists, researchers and election practitioners are concerned about greater participation by women and the question of women's role in democracy in the SADC region (Matlosa 2005; Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005). Participatory democracy, as the term suggests, pertains to participation of the people in the governance system. Such 'participation' would be a sham if it failed to highlight women's political contribution – especially to elections.

Generally, in the SADC region, women participate in politics in comparatively higher numbers than men. In South Africa in 2004, for instance, women constituted a remarkable '54.82 percent of registered voters – testament to the importance women attach to the vote and to the role of formal politics in their lives' (Meintjes 2005, p 236), a noteworthy point as the country prepares for the 2014 elections, since political parties will probably be eager to collect as many votes as possible from these women.

Women in South Africa have consistently been in the majority of registered voters (Roberts, Struwig & Grossberg 2012, p 7; Hicks & Buccus 2012, p 37). Electoral data for 2000 show that more than 10-million women were registered to vote compared to a little over 8-million (8 394 532) men. Almost a decade later (2009), there was still a clear gender split in favour of women (51.68% compared to 48.32%) (IEC 2009b).

Representation, gender and elections

In terms of democratic participation through elections, representation suggests that an individual is elected or appointed to represent the interests of someone else in a public forum. This also presupposes an element of accountability and legitimacy enjoyed by those who purport to represent others. Many women in political parties, however, experience the frustration of having to 'toe the party line' (Kadima & Booysen 2009, p 29) and dare not contradict their parties' operational and policy strategies even if these clearly undermine women's rights or somehow discriminate on the basis of gender. Equitable gender representation, therefore, must be addressed at the highest levels by parties and governments.

Yoon (2011, p 84) states that '[n]umerous studies have examined whether growth in the number (or proportion) of women in parliaments makes a difference', as has been suggested by the 'critical mass theory'. Murray (2013, p 305) believes public representatives should not be elected according to old-style values of 'education, social prestige, power and influence', which reinforce masculinities, but rather according to '... proximity to people's daily concerns and shared experience and understanding of people's problems, [which] are seldom considered essential criteria when selecting candidates'.

Ironically, however, there is evidence that in some SADC countries '[t]op political leadership positions are often not open for political competition' (Olaleye 2003, p 2) for reasons explained above. Yet, some international observers state that 'in emerging democracies it is now generally accepted that special provision should be made to ensure the participation of women, while many long-established democracies still lag behind' (IDEA 2005, p 17).

This presents a dilemma for women's participation and representation in elections in Africa and in the SADC region in particular. On the one hand, it sends a positive signal to Africans that the time has come for them to examine critically women's role in society, on the other, it underscores the fact that it might still be a long time before the majority of Africans genuinely embrace the fundamental tenets of equality between women and men as an inevitable historical reality of 21st-century political systems.

It is further noted that women

represent a major group in the process of democratic consolidation through multi-party elections. Scores of political parties seriously lack representation in this regard, given that women remain marginalised in the main arena of political activity (parliament and cabinets).

Olaleye 2003, p 3

Recent data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union suggest a mixed picture of gains or progress made by some African countries in terms of women's participation and representation in parliaments.

Table 1
Women's Representation in Parliaments: World Rankings

WORLD CLASSIFICATION									
Rank	Country	Lower or single house				Upper house or senate			
		Elections	Seats*	Women	% W	Elections	Seats*	Women	% W
1	Rwanda	(9) 2008	80	45	56.3%	(9) 2011	26	10	38.5%
8	South Africa**	(4) 2009	400	169	42.3%	(4) 2009	53	17	32.1%
12	Mozambique	(10) 2009	250	98	39.2%	-	-	-	--
22	Angola	(8) 2012	220	75	34.1%	-	-	-	-
38	Lesotho	(5) 2012	120	32	26.7%	(6) 2012	33	9	27.3%
48	Namibia	(11) 2009	78	19	24.4%	(11) 2010	26	7	26.9%
58	Malawi	(5) 2009	193	43	22.3%	-	-	-	--
73	Mauritius	(5) 2010	69	13	18.8%	-	--	-	-
78	Madagascar	(10) 2010	366	64	17.5%	(10) 2010	164	20	12.2%
90	Zimbabwe	(3) 2008	214	32	15.0%	(3) 2008	99	24	24.2%
105	Zambia	(9) 2011	157	18	11.5%	--	--	--	-
116	DRC	(11) 2011	492	44	8.9%	(1) 2007	108	6	5.6%
122	Botswana	(10) 2009	63	5	7.9%	-	-	-	-

Source: IPU 2013

* Figures correspond to the number of seats currently filled in parliaments. The figures in brackets before the year signify a country's global ranking in terms of women's representation during the year in question.

** South Africa: The figures showing the distribution of seats for the Upper House or Senate do not include the 36 special rotating delegates appointed on an ad hoc basis, and all percentages given are therefore calculated on the basis of the 53 permanent seats.

The data above suggest that, apart from Botswana, and possibly Zambia, Mauritius and Namibia, SADC countries are doing better than other countries in the world, but Rwanda continues to tower above all African countries and remains a global role model in terms of women's representation in Parliament.

OBSERVATIONS ON GENDER, PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN THE SADC REGION

In 2008 Mukasa (p 16) noted that:

Over the last decade, the SADC region has witnessed a number of notable achievements to the situation of women. In politics, there have been great strides with respect to the participation of women in decision-making. Electoral reforms in Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa have resulted in an increase in parliamentary representation over and above the required 30 per cent target set by the SADC GAD [Protocol on Gender and Development].

It appears that progress was made with regard to women's participation and representation in SADC. However, it remains unclear whether the momentum was sustained, given the region's 'ground breaking appointments of women to high level posts such as prime minister and deputy president, speakers of parliament, and ministers to cabinet portfolios that were hitherto the domain of men, such as Foreign Affairs, Finance and Defence' (Mukasa 2008, p 16).

What can the region do about the factors that undermine women's participation and representation in their countries' elections? Using the example of women in Madagascar, some election management experts suggest specific measures to empower women in politics. Among these are:

- Capacity building for political candidates;
- Policy advocacy for political parties to mainstream gender in their recruitment of candidates and candidate nomination processes and for Parliament to consider adopting gender-sensitive legislation;
- Ensuring gender mainstreaming in legislative debates and adopted laws;
- Sharing and dissemination of information on women in politics to the public at large.

While these measures have been tried elsewhere in the SADC region, for instance, in South Africa since 1994 and Zimbabwe (see Gender Links 2013), the significance of such proposals is that they are advanced by an influential, impartial and professional body with a presence on the African continent; which might assist women, not only in Madagascar, but in Africa generally.

Some propose the establishment of a 'partnership between men and women as an essential factor in accomplishing the change and impacting on politics' (IDEA 2005, p 254). Looking beyond numbers and focusing on substantive issues such as the specific contribution women make once they are elected to top political positions is another option. But 'looking beyond numbers does not mean that numbers no longer matter. On the contrary, numbers are integral to making an impact on politics' (IDEA 2005, p 255). Thus, 'there is still much work to be done to increase women's political participation' (IDEA 2005, p 255) and this applies as much to SADC countries as it does to the rest of the world.

Finally, the question of whether or not to adopt or promote electoral gender quotas for women remains controversial (EISA 2010, p 7). Some SADC countries have adopted voluntary party-based quotas for women, but these have fallen short of women's expectations as they were 'left to the goodwill of political parties to put women on their lists'; hence, some women press for legislated quotas (Tlakula 2012, p vii). Some electoral gender quotas

also touch on the current theoretical debate about 'women as a group' and draw attention to the problem of whether it is theoretically acceptable to continue saying 'we' about a single category of women [which obviously raises] several conflicting discourses on gender and electoral quotas, both in theory and practice.

Dahlerup & Freidenvall 2005, p 31

Overall, and as some quota advocates insist (Murray 2013, p 304), electoral gender quotas for women in SADC countries have appeared to boost women's political participation and representation, especially in South Africa. However, this depends on the kind of quota system adopted. Some examples include 'candidate quota systems or quotas through political parties, mandatory legislative quotas for all parties, or a designated number of reserved seats set aside for women' (True 2013, p 354, citing Krook 2010). Yet it is debatable whether women's participation and representation have improved solely as a result of such quotas, although some insist that '[e]lectoral gender quotas are key to increasing women's legislative representation' (Bauer 2008, p 350). Others feel that quota systems can 'lead to a symbolic or "token presence" of women in politics rather than to a more legitimate and substantial form of participation' (Tiessen 2008, p 200, citing Goetz & Hassim 2003, p 52).

Thus, whether quotas will work also depends upon the electoral system adopted and the political processes (EISA 2010, pp 1-6). Accordingly, Bauer argues that in her three Southern African case studies the countries 'have all increased the number of women MPs using a closed list PR [proportional representation] electoral system and voluntary political party-based quotas'. Murray (2013, p 304) adds that gender quotas for women should 'go beyond the mere feminization of politics' and assist societies to 'effect wider change and renewal'.

For women who aspire to political positions, finding time for community responsibilities despite the difficulties they may face (Tiessen 2008, p 208), greater interest in elections or politics may help to promote their political participation and representation.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

An attempt was made in this article to analyse each of the 15 SADC countries. However, this was not always possible given the difficulty of obtaining current and reliable empirical data on the subject. Similarly, the swing of the pendulum between achievement and regression in some countries in terms of women's representation made it difficult to identify consistent trends in the region.

CONCLUSION

The article has examined the unequal political participation and representation of women in SADC countries. In its analysis of some of the hurdles women face in politics it has explored the relevance of theories of democracy, including game theory, rational choice theory, theories of democratic consolidation and the Ubuntu philosophy.

An attempt was made to examine critically the region's political processes, especially elections, by analysing gender and women's roles in a democracy using feminist theories. It is argued that despite progressive legislation and a few 'successes' in some SADC countries (such as South Africa), overall, women's political representation in the region still raises concerns.

The situation in South Africa probably deserves much more careful analysis as the country may be regarded as the region's role model with regard to women's representation and participation in politics. According to Hassim (2006, p 259), in South Africa

[i]t is clear that in many respects women in particular have benefited from the new institutional and procedural arrangements in the state. Women are treated as a constituency with special interests that need to be represented in policy-making.

Although many political parties have gradually accepted this trend, much of the significant participation and representation of women in South Africa's politics can be attributed to the governing ANC and its largely gender responsive post-1994 approach. Yet the influence of a strong and diverse social movement (Hassim 2006, p 258), including other non-governmental and non-state actors, in sustaining pressure for women's representation and participation, cannot be overlooked, although opposition parties have not matched the ANC in this regard.

Ironically, while the main opposition Democratic Alliance's (DA) leader is a woman, she and her party were criticised in the local media when the (DA-ruled) Western Cape appointed an all-male Cabinet after the 2009 elections (*Mail & Guardian*, 26 April-2 May 2013, pp 18-19). Similarly, some SADC countries are still to meet the target of 30% of women in key political structures, whereas South Africa has adopted the 50-50 principle and seeks to implement a 'Zebra list' system, 'with women's and men's names alternated like the black and white stripes of a zebra' (Bauer 2008, p 362; EISA 2010, p 5). Some countries, among them Mozambique and Namibia, have followed this trend by adopting proportional representation electoral systems.

Generally, women's representation in South Africa's key national and provincial sectors has fared fairly well under the ANC, with more women occupying senior parliamentary, government and other public positions. Yet, it remains unclear how women's representation might change given recent proposals by some opposition parties of electoral reform (Ramphela 2013), presumably in favour of constituency-based electoral system with elements of proportionality.

The influential South African weekly newspaper, the *Mail & Guardian* (26 April-2 May 2013), has called for a 'political champion for women's rights' to ensure that the gender agenda is implemented in the country. However, it lamented the fact that South African's President, Jacob Zuma, holds 'conservative views towards women' and is reported to have said that women should be mothers; which raised a national outcry.

Overall, women's situation in politics in the region requires forceful political will, including concerted action from women in general, if their political participation and representation in the governance processes of SADC countries are to be enhanced. Advancing women's political participation and representation through a women's quota remains another option, 'not for the sake of statistics but to place women in decision-making positions so they can inform political decision-making' (Shale 2012, p 112). This undoubtedly calls for substantive participation and representation which goes 'beyond numbers' (IDEA 2005) or the 'simple feminization of politics' (Murray 2013, p 304).

In conclusion, the author suggests some measures to empower and build capacity for women candidates and political party members and highlight the

need for women to be more interested in politics, particularly elections, to enhance their participation and representation. Ultimately, women's political participation and representation in the electoral processes in the SADC region depends on the visible actions of public leaders at grassroots levels such as party branches or cells, district, provincial or other structures, which determine who to include in or exclude from final election party lists.

If party and government leaders fail to support women's genuine and equal participation and representation, or if they choose to adopt rhetoric and tokenistic measures, this will forever undermine the progress that women have so far made in many SADC countries.

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