

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN POLITICS IN TANZANIA

ANGELLAH KAIRUKI || The United Republic of Tanzania is an Eastern African country, member of the East African Community (EAC), Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) and of course the African Union. As its name indicates, it is a union of two countries, Tanganyika and Zanzibar, which formed a new country and agreed to name it the "United Republic of Tanzania" in April 1964. The participation of women in politics has been steadily advancing through the various phases of Tanzania's political history. This paper seeks to highlight the brief history of the part women have played in politics in general, and the role of gender equality and women's rights in sustainable socio-economic development. Furthermore, it is in particular the experience of women's participation in Parliament which will be used to illustrate how the different strategies adopted by Tanzania on women's representation have worked out, the successes recorded and the challenges encountered.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS

Historically, women have always been active in politics in Tanzania. They participated actively in the struggle for independence although once independence was achieved, the first cabinet did not have a single woman. A story is told that when the late Bibi Titi demanded an explanation from the then President, the late Julius Nyerere, first president of independent Tanganyika and later of the United Republic of Tanzania, as to why he did not include women in his cabinet as full ministers, she was informed that there were no women with 'relevant experience'.¹ The late Bibi Titi Mohamed who had been instrumental during the pre-independence struggles in mobilizing women and men for party membership, and in resource mobilization for the political party which won independence from the British in 1961, found this absurd, as she wondered where the male counterparts had learnt the art of statesmanship prior to independence. In her view, this was the beginning of the institutionalization of discriminatory political practices at high levels of decision making.

However, the story continues that after that challenge, another Tanzanian woman politician,

the late Sophia Kawawa, followed up on her senior sister's point and confronted Mwalimu Nyerere with specific facts about his male appointees, some of whom had been her classmates and had no "superior" qualifications except the fact that they were males and she was a woman.² It could be that the future responses of Tanzania's policy on women's participation in politics reflect the early interventions by these courageous women politicians, coupled with Nyerere's own widely acknowledged political maturity. The current Chairperson of the Tanzania Women Parliamentary Group (TWPG), Hon. Anna Abdallah, was the immediate beneficiary of this early challenge on women's place in the political arena. She was promoted to full Cabinet Minister in the 1960s and has remained active in politics and concerned with gender equality ever since.

Soon after Tanganyika gained independence in 1961, a quota system for women's representation in Parliament was implemented by the then ruling party, with 6 out of 73 Members of Parliament (7.6 %) being women on the basis of affirmative action. Tanzania became a de facto one-party state at independence, and de jure so from 1965 to 1992 when multiparty politics were

ushered in due to national and international pressure for change. Today, the ratio of women Members of Parliament stands at 36 % in 2012. It should be noted that although the number of women parliamentarians has continued to grow steadily, this has been almost exclusively via affirmative action, a route which is constitutionally referred to as "special seats for women".

The reasons for the slow pace of women's accession to Parliament are not difficult to comprehend. Apart from the traditional cultural barriers, political parties were also reluctant to field female candidates in the past because of the perception that they were more likely to lose elections. On the other hand, Constituent Members were not easily convinced that a female candidate would make an effective representative, let alone legislator.

A woman landed the first constituency seat in 1985, amidst 22 special seats, thus bringing the total of women MPs to 23 out of 239 MPs. This amounted to a 9.62 % ratio for women. In 2010, women won 26 constituency seats, the highest ever in the history of the National Assembly, and another 102 special seats out of 357 MPs (36 %). This is the highest number of women MPs, the highest number of constituency seats won by women through direct vote (election) by voters and the highest ratio to that of male MPs ever in the history of the National Assembly.

In 1993, women parliamentarians constituted themselves into the Tanzania Women Parliamentary Group, an association of all women parliamentarians in Tanzania. Since 1993 it is registered as a non-governmental organization, and operates both within and outside Parliament. Its members are drawn from current sitting women parliamentarians (elected; nominated by the President; and special seats) and it is non-partisan. TWPG's membership makes up 36 % of the parliamentary membership. The objective of TWPG is to build the capacity of women Members of Parliament for effectiveness as legislators. Its membership is across party lines, in that all women members in any of the political parties present in Parliament are eligible members. Currently, the parties with members include the ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), Chama Cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA), Civic United Front (CUF) and NCCR-Mageuzi.

THE CURRENT STATUS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Tanzania's legal framework for female representation is found in the country's Constitution which provides that "Political parties which took part in the general elections and obtained at least 5 % of the total valid votes for parliamentary election shall propose to the National Electoral Commission the names of women on the basis of the proportion of votes obtained by each party in the parliamentary election ..." (Article 78 (1) read together with Article 66 (i) (b) of the Constitution).

Each political party submits a list of names for women candidates to the National Electoral Commission and the said Commission is required to adhere to it after consultation with the party concerned, for the purposes of filling any MP vacancy of this category should one occur during the life of Parliament.

Affirmative action is provided for in Article 66 (1) (b) of the Constitution which adds that the total number of women MPs should not be less than 30 % of all the Members of Parliament in accordance with Article 78 on the basis of the proportion of votes referred to above. Thus, in addition to any constituency seats women may win in constituencies, further 30 % reserved seats (special seats) are guaranteed under the current Constitution, which is currently undergoing review since May 2012. In view of the relatively encouraging trend in women winning constituency seats in the last general elections, women are striving to achieve 50/50 gender parity by 2015 at all levels of decision making, especially in Parliament and district councils, as per the 2008 SADC Gender Protocol and the African Union Protocol on 50/50 representation of men and women in positions of decision making by 2015.

It is clear that this model of recruiting women representatives through affirmative action has met with considerable success.

SUCSESSES

The physical presence of greater numbers of women in Parliament has meant that the voices for gender equality have grown stronger. Firstly, the synergy effects have resulted in a diversity of experiences and skills which in turn led to greater efficiency. Secondly, the Women's Parlia-

mentary Caucus also became a stronger link to civil society, especially when advocating for the enactment of gender-sensitive laws. Thirdly, TWPG as an organization enables access to parliamentarians through the organization of seminars, workshops and other forums to dialogue on different issues relating to women, children, special interest groups and other social and economic development issues. Fourthly, the increased numbers of women in Parliament are translating into positions of leadership. The current Speaker of the National Assembly is a woman; she also heads two standing committees. Women parliamentarians also head four other standing committees which means that women head six of the total 17 standing committees. These are major achievements which could bring about a change in traditional attitudes about women's credibility as leaders in the public sphere.

Despite these relatively positive successes, Tanzania's experience of recruiting women into Parliament and indeed into local government (which follows a similar pattern) has revealed some challenges.

SOME OF THE CHALLENGES

The Reality and Public Perceptions

The first challenge has been a backlash associated with special seats. As noted above, the greater majority of women parliamentarians have come to Parliament through affirmative action. However, parliamentary membership through special seats has recently come under fire and this is a major concern to TWPG members who see it as an attack on their turf. On the one hand, women and other stakeholders are questioning the selection process as well as the substantive representation of their interests in the House. On both accounts, women special seat MPs are seen as primarily representing their political parties and not their "special" constituencies. Yet the need for affirmative action to increase women's presence in decision making positions including Parliament cannot be over-emphasized. Not only is it a hard-won victory for all women but it has also enabled the emergence of outstanding Tanzanian women leaders. Moreover, the contribution by women in Parliament is needed so as to bring on board women's perspectives and attributes into the debating halls and corridors of

decision making power. Already, the results speak for themselves. The following Table 1 illustrates women's representation in Parliament since independence, by year and number.

Consequently, as far as the Union House of Representatives (Parliament) is concerned, without affirmative action women's representation in Parliament would probably be less than 10 %, as shown by the above statistical trend.

The Stigma of Special Seats MPs

Although the role of affirmative action in correcting historical shortcomings is understood and generally accepted, women serving as special seats MPs in Tanzania face stigma under the current system. The reasons for this are many, in addition to political competition between men and women. But some of these reasons are rooted in the current electoral system.

For example: 1. Given the fact that the electorate does not directly elect special seats MPs, the public does not understand the manner in which the special seats MPs are elected to Parliament (and district councils). As a result, there is wide speculation that special seats MPs use "inappropriate" means to get appointed or elected, and these means may work against the interest of those being represented, the women. This speculation is given credence by the fact that there is a uniform selection system which is mandated by law and binding on all political parties.

2. The selection system is managed by political parties while all 18 registered political parties are led by men. Without gender mainstreaming of the internal system of political parties, patriarchal practices continue to compromise the otherwise good intentions of the Constitution.

3. Special seats MPs are discriminated against by the parliamentary rules in the constituencies they are assigned to work. Instances of discrimination include denial of constituency development funding which other MPs get and use for assistance in development activities in their constituencies. Further, special seats MPs are excluded from the District Council's Finance Committee. Moreover, constituency MPs do not take kindly to special seats MPs visiting or doing community work in their constituencies. All these obstacles confound the chances for women MPs of winning constituency votes.

Table 1: The trend of women's entry into Parliament between 1961 and 2010

Year	Women Members of Parliament			Total Seats	% total seats
	Constituencies	Women's Seats	Total		
2010	26	102	128	357	35.85~36
2005	17	75	92	307	29.97
2000	12	48	60	279	21.51
1995	8	37	45	269	16.73
1990	2	19	21	242	8.68
1985	1	22	23	239	9.62
1980	0	6	6	167	3.59
1975	0	13	13	207	6.28
1970	0	9	9	194	4.64
1965	0	6	6	183	3.28
1961	0	6	6	73	7.59

Source: Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania 2011

4. Last but not least, the gender balance of minimum representation of men to women stipulated in the Constitution is 30 %, which is below the 50/50 threshold agreed by the SADC Heads of State in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development in 2008 and the African Union Gender Policy on the 50/50 Gender Parity Principle.

To address these challenges, TWPG and other civil society organizations have taken advantage of the country's ongoing Constitutional Review Process to propose changes to the current electoral system. The proposed model is to maintain affirmative action but provide scope for the direct election of women MPs through fielding one male and one female candidate in the constituencies. Fortunately, the Draft Constitution of the Union has adopted this recommendation.

TANZANIA'S EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

Between 2004 and 2012 there has been a significant increase of women in decision making bodies in some areas, but more still needs to be done. The following table shows the comparison of 2004 with 2012 on the representation of women in decision making bodies in Tanzania.

Table 2: Representation of women in decision making bodies in Tanzania 2004-May 2012.

LEADERSHIP POSITION	2004			2012			2004	2012
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	% of women	
CABINET								
Ministers	23	4	27	22	8	30	15	27
Deputy Ministers	12	4	16	18	4	22	29	18
PARLIAMENT								
Members of Parliament								
Elected MPs	218	12	230	217	21	238	5	8.8
Special Seats	–	48	48	–	102	102	100	100
Presidential Nominees MPs	8	2	10	4	3	7	20	42.8
PUBLIC SERVICE								
Permanent Secretaries	18	7	25	23	5	28	28	17.8
Deputy Permanent Secretaries	7	1	8	18	7	25	12.5	28
Commissioners	16	3	19	9	4	13	15	30.8*
Assistant Commissioners	–	–	–	19	6	25	–	24*
Directors	83	30	133	33	88	121	26	27*
Assistant Directors	–	–	–	81	44	125	–	35*
Personal Secretaries to Ministers	–	–	–	25	1	26	–	4*
REGIONAL ADMINISTRATION								
Regional Commissioners	18	2	20	15	6	21	10	28.6
Regional Administrative Secretaries	17	6	23	12	9	21	23	43
LOCAL GOVERNMENT								
District Commissioners	84	20	104	90	43	133	21	32
District Executive Directors	86	14	100	99	34	133	14	26*
COURT OF APPEAL								
Judges	8	4	12	5	16	21	33	76*
POLITICAL PARTIES								
Chairpersons	–	–	–	14	3	17	–	18
PARLIAMENT LEADERSHIP								
Speaker	1	–	1	–	1	1	–	100
Deputy Speaker	1	–	1	1	–	1	100	–
Attorney General	1	–	1	1	–	1	100	–
Parliament Secretary	1	–	1	1	–	1	100	–

Source: Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children, May 2012.

* Means data is up to 2011

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

This may sound like a rhetorical question, but much needs to be done. In the first place, it must be acknowledged that gender equality and women's rights are an essential bridge to sustainable socio-economic development. It can be seen from the history of the global women's movement and the integration of women into the UN system that such realization does not come automatically. Above all, gender equality is rooted in the first ever human rights instrument, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which categorically stated that discrimination on the basis of sex was unacceptable. Yet this international bill of rights, a statement of faith powerfully expressed by the then independent states of the international community, did not lead to most member states introducing legislation and policies which would promote gender equality.

It took many years of hard work inside and outside the United Nations to bring gender equality issues to the global agenda. The UN Decade for Women which started in Mexico City in 1975, the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies in 1985 and the Beijing Conference and Plan of Action in 1995, Millennium Development Goals in 2000 as well as similar efforts at different levels regionally and internationally point to the important realization that sustainable social and economic development is not possible without taking concrete action on gender equality and women's rights.

These efforts consolidated women's work on the ground by instigating and demanding action on gender equality in areas ranging from marriage, the criminal justice system, the workplace, health, education and the community at large. It was therefore not surprising that although the UDHR was adopted in 1948, it was not until 1993 at the International Conference on Human Rights in Vienna that the international community finally acknowledged the obvious, that women's rights are human rights.

In Tanzania, there has been active participation in these international and regional frameworks to address gender equality and women's rights issues, not only because it is the right thing to do but also because doing so accelerates sustainable socio-economic development as a whole. In the ongoing Constitutional Review Process in the country, the government has sought

the views of women through the Constitutional Review Commission. Women's groups including the TWPG have made pertinent recommendations to be incorporated into the new constitution which would go a long way towards enhancing gender equality. These recommendations include the following:

Guarantee of the right for women to own land, especially in the context of inheritance.

The right not to be discriminated against by any system of law, however pluralistic the legal system may be.

Affirmation of the supremacy of the Constitution vis-à-vis customary law.

Comprehensive protection of rights of women and children to ensure their dignity.

Equal representation of women in decision making and 50/50 gender parity in decision making bodies.

Good governance and accountability to ensure transparency and efficient management of national resources, and access to basic needs such as water and health services.

Integration of equity and equality principles in the Constitution.

State support and protection of the family as the basic unit of society, including marriage and social welfare.

Institutional framework for the promotion, protection and monitoring of gender equality.

Consumer rights protection against counterfeit products including fake or poor quality anti-malarial drugs, as these often affect women disproportionately due to their lower incomes, pregnancy and caring for the sick in home-based care.

Most of these recommendations have been incorporated in the Draft Constitution which was launched on 3 June 2013. The process is still ongoing but there is hope for a gender mainstreamed constitution addressing long-standing issues on gender equality.

There is no doubt that even if all the proposals are adopted down to the last detail, the promulgation of the new constitution is a process that requires continuous monitoring.

CONCLUSION

This short paper is an attempt to present the process by which the United Republic of Tanzania has achieved female representation through

affirmative action. It has outlined how women were edged out of politics at independence, and has described the slow but steady pace of women's entry into the National Assembly and some of the recorded successes and challenges. These challenges include an attack on the present system of affirmative action and the attainment of 50/50 representation. It can only be hoped that these challenges will be addressed in the ongoing Constitutional Review Process before 2015 when the General Elections will be held. The participation of women in politics and decision making is a very important link to sustainable development because it ensures that the voices of women as well as men, boys and girls are heard, and the demand for accountability does not go unheeded.

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NOTES

- 1 See Meena, Ruth: paper on Women and Political Participation (unpublished).
- 2 Hon. Anna M. Abdallah, Contribution to the discussion at a seminar organized by the Tanzania Women Parliamentary Group on the Constitutional Review Process at Msekwa Hall, Dodoma, Tanzania, 7 August 2012.