

Achieving Gender Parity in Political Participation in Tanzania

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Background

This article looks at the key challenges of achieving gender parity in Tanzania and considers whether the quota system can be an opportunity for achieving parity. The discussion draws heavily on TGNP's engagement in local and general election processes since 1995, and, more specifically on a recent election feedback session held with women who contested at ward and constituency level from Dar-es-Salaam and Pwani regions in the 2010 general election. The first part will provide an introduction of what TGNP does in line with women's political participation with some key achievements so far. This will be followed by a discussion on some key challenges towards achieving gender parity in Tanzania and on whether the quota system serves as an opportunity. The last part serves as a conclusion with some recommendations on the way forward.

Introduction

The Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) has been in existence since 1993, during which time it has become a leading member of the transformative feminist movement within Tanzania, Africa and beyond. Its vision and mission focus towards the attainment of social transformation with gender equality/equity, social justice and women's empowerment at all levels. One of the organization's goals has been to promote women's active participation in decision-making and the inclusion of feminist concerns at the forefront of decision-making processes.

TGNP's work on electoral processes began in 1994/95 during the preparations for the first multi party elections. There were two aspects of engagement, first creating gender awareness within the existing political structures and second, changing the existing political structures to recognize the role of citizens in order in turn to increase the participation of women. General and local government elections are seen as critical opportunities to advance these goals, and TGNP has employed a number of strategies, including:

- the Gender Budget Initiative, which has been ongoing since 1997;
- advocacy for constitutional change;
- preparations and launch of women voter's manifesto in Kiswahili as a tool to influence the election processes (so far TGNP, in collaboration with Feminist Activist Coalition--a coalition of about 50 national civil society organisations (CSOs)—has produced and launched women's voter manifestos in 2000, 2005 and 2010);
- awareness/capacity building sessions with women candidates;

- awareness sessions with leaders of political parties;
- awareness sessions with electoral bodies;
- civic education from a gender/feminist perspective to the public;
- awareness sessions with women groups from different localities;
- awareness/capacity building session with faith based/religious and community leaders (2010);
- analysis of political parties manifesto on key feminist/gender issues;
- awareness sessions with media, both editors and media personnel;
- Media engagement through TV and Radio talk shows and, TV and Radio.

All these initiatives have contributed to greater participation by women in the political sphere. According to Article 66 of Tanzania's Constitution, a quota system defines 30 % of the seats in parliament as “special seats”, which are allocated to women who are nominated by those political parties that gain at least 5 % of the votes in the general election. Women also run for election in the normal way in the constituencies.

The numbers and percentage of women elected as Members of Parliament increased from 21.5% in 2000 elections to 30.3% in the 2005 elections and 35% in 2010. In 2005, out of the 323 seats, 97 were held by women, of whom 17 were elected from the constituencies (an increase from 12 in 2000, and only 8 in 1995), while a further 75 women were elected to the special seats (an increase from 48 in 2000) and 3 women were appointed by the President (an increase from 2 in the 2000 elections). In the current parliament we have a total number of 339 Members of Parliament, out of which 125 are women, of whom 20 were elected from constituencies. It is clear that the high level of women in parliament achieved mainly through the special seats programme.

TGNP’s initiatives have contributed to 557 women contesting for seats in parliament in 2010, out of whom 190 contested at constituency level, compared to 70 in 2005. TGNP’s work has also been able to raise gender awareness with different groups, including Members of Parliaments, particularly the women parliamentarians group. Notwithstanding these achievements, women in Tanzania still face many challenges, some of which are discussed below.

Challenges to achieving gender parity

The environment in which elections take place is still retrogressive and male dominated. The revised Election Act of 2010, for example, still shows male bias and class bias in the language, composition of electoral commission, and exorbitant expenses required for contesting seats. In a context where marginalized women own few resources, everything to do with money has a gender and class implication. The issue of election deposits, for example, is a barrier for many women candidates. Women candidates are more likely to be unable to raise the required sum, and therefore unable to go forward, than their male counterparts. In Tanzania, the presidential candidate is required to deposit up to 5,000,000 Tsh. which is equivalent to nearly €2,500 while a parliamentary candidate will need to deposit up to Tsh. 1,000,000 (€500). For those women who manage to go through the deposit steps, they will then incur costs to deploy people to monitor, protect and count their votes during Election Day in different polling stations within wards or in the constituencies they are contesting. During a feedback session held by TGNP after the 2010

General Election, it was revealed that the average cost of paying a monitor was around T.sh 30,000 (€15). While some women candidates did manage to deploy monitors in the areas where they thought they had mass support, many could not afford to.

Structures within political parties are not conducive to women's participation, and lack of political support and leadership impact on their abilities to climb the electoral ladder. It is widely known that political parties use women in mobilizing membership, fundraising and campaigning for contestants who are mainly men. However, this does not translate into supporting women in attaining leadership positions within political parties or standing for elections. Decision-making within the existing political parties in Tanzania is also male dominated. Starting from the nomination process, most women are screened out through unclear criteria set by party central committees, who, according to those who participated in the process, are mainly men. Those few who managed to get through are left with little or no party support and few women poll sufficient votes to be elected. To run for a constituency, candidates must be party members and must apply to be endorsed by a political party's decision-making organs. Parties will inevitably endorse those individuals most likely to defend their ideological interests. In a situation where the interests of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment conflict with ideological interests that are informed by belief systems embedded in people's cultures, this militates against women candidates. . It is equally important to note that most of the women's wings or women's sections of political parties—where they exist—are not autonomous, and do not decide on or even fully participate in the development of criteria, screening or nomination processes.

There is no level playing field socially and economically: in general, women in Tanzania have less access to resources than men in all aspects of life, including education, and therefore have fewer economic opportunities than their male counterparts. Lack of economic power has major implications for women in terms of accessing electoral positions, especially in relation to expenditure needs during campaigning, as noted above, including lack of economically powerful networks to support them with campaign resources. This is partly because of discriminatory norms and taboos, but to a large extent because of the disproportionate burden of social responsibilities on women within families and communities, especially in the context of HIV+AIDS and the current economic trends.

It is important to note that skills-based training on campaigning related topics, such as skills in raising key gender issues, confidence building, how to engage with media, public speaking, meeting procedures, fundraising and many others, especially in the context where women are facing many challenges in accessing electoral positions, is very beneficial and key for women candidates. However, late dispersal of funds for training and publicity was a problem in 2010: while there was funding from UNDP/UNIFEM for capacity building, funds were not released until a point when women should already have been in the field campaigning. The late availability of funds acted as a barrier to women's full participation in the existing political system.

During the post-election feedback session, contestants emphasized that the media tend to treat women and men contestants differently in their campaign coverage, a factor which hinders women's access to political arena. Elections have become an incentive business for private media houses who receive payments from political parties and individual contestants; since most

women don't have money to pay, they receive minimal or no coverage at all. This was the case of many women contestants, especially from the oppositions, who did not have resources for campaigning except from their own pockets, and were unsuccessful in seeking election.

Lack of political will: Tanzania is signatory to many international and regional standards which bind it morally and legally to equity and non discriminatory policies in the development processes, including gender parity in political participation. These instruments include CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development and the African Charter of Human and People's Rights. Additionally, the country has taken measures in translating these commitments into national policy frameworks, laws and regulations like the National Development Vision (2025) and the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (MKUKUTA/MKUZA). However, translation of policies into practice has been a major challenge. To take the example of Rwanda, for example, women in Rwanda now top the world rankings of women in national parliaments. This did not happen by chance, there was a lot of mobilization of women across Rwanda by the Ministry of Gender and Promotion of Women. Most importantly from the early stages of post-genocide, women were involved in the drawing up of a new Constitution for Rwanda that guaranteed them a minimum of 30% of National Assembly seats. Hence, women's high level of participation and leadership in post-genocide politics in both government and civil society helped to provide the foundation for their successful efforts in the elections. In the Tanzanian context, the Ministry of Community Development Gender and Children lacks the human and financial resources and political mandate to spearhead such change.

Gender blind legal and policy framework: the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania provides for equal participation of women and men in all aspects of the political process. It requires government and all institutions to provide for equal opportunity for both women and men. Para 21 affirms that every citizen of the United Republic of Tanzania has a right to participate in the governance of the country directly or through their elected representative. Para 22 provides for equality of opportunity and equal rights through equal terms and conditions to hold public office. Furthermore, the Constitution, after various amendments, provides for affirmative action to rectify historical gender imbalances in women's access to representative organs of state, such as parliament and local council, through the provision of "special seats" for women in addition to the constituency seats. However, the same constitution under article 51 (2) marginalizes special seats by providing that members of parliament to be appointed Prime Minister shall only come from amongst constituency members of parliament. By implication, a special seats or presidential appointee may not become Prime Minister. This continues to undermine the special seats women, some whom would have made excellent potential candidates for the premier post. Generally special seats MPs have limited access to some key resources like the Constituency Development Fund and limited political voices within the parliament.

Is the quota system an opportunity to achieve the gender parity?

Quotas are special measures applied to redress certain historical imbalances, such as gender disparities or regional disparities. This discussion will focus on addressing gender disparities. Modalities vary: in some countries, as a result of feminist activism, political parties voluntarily take measures to address the imbalances by pushing for greater participation by women (the

Scandinavian model is an example of this); in Tanzania, the quota system is set out in a constitution provision, Article 66 1(b).

The quota system through special seats has contributed to women accessing more seats in the Tanzanian parliament in spite of many existing challenges. This is also the case in Rwanda, where a multi-ballot system operates at local level: each voter receives three ballots, one of which includes only women candidates. Indirect elections to the next levels are structured to ensure that at least 20%% of those elected are women. Through this combination of multiple ballots and indirect elections to each higher level, Rwanda has been able to break the world record of women's participation in parliament.

The quota system can most certainly be used as an opportunity to increase the number of women in political offices. However, there remains the question of the extent to which the establishment of proper, concrete mechanisms to attain the parity, in line with international, regional and national commitments, is on the agenda of political parties or the Government. Tanzania is the case in point here. Following Tanzania's endorsement of the Beijing Platform for Action, it was agreed to prioritize women's political empowerment in line with Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration, which had set a benchmark of 30% female representation in parliaments. The 2000 amendment to the Tanzanian Constitution resulted in the percentage of special seats being increased to 20% in parliament and 33.3% in local councils, which was below the SADC benchmark. A further constitution amendment in 2005 increased the target to 30%, in line with the 1997 SADC benchmark, while the motion was towards achieving 50% women representation in line with SADC goal and African Union Constituent benchmark of 50/50 by 2010.

It should be noted that although Tanzania has reached the benchmark of SADC by 2005, and the constitutional benchmark of the 30% critical minority, this is still below the African Union Constituent benchmark of 50/50 in parliament. Additionally, the discourse on 30% or 50% has not gone hand in hand with a discourse of transforming the broader picture and addressing the general condition of women in the economy.

The ruling party promise of achieving 50% ratio of women in decision-making positions; The government of President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete pledged its commitment to achieve 50% women in Parliament by 2010. To reach that, the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children started to coordinate views and proposals on the best strategies to put in place towards the 2010 elections. TGNP and other women's rights organizations including Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA), under the umbrella of FemAct, worked very hard to rally behind the promise in terms of providing its expertise, lobbying and advocacy on the matter. The organizations even provided a cost effective proposal to political parties on how best to achieve the 50% women's representation through constituencies. In spite of many efforts, the strategy of achieving 50% women's representation under the coordination of the Ministry of Community Development Gender and Children is not yet in place, nor is there a systematic guidance directing all political parties to abide with this declaration. The strategy employed by the ruling party of using special seats to achieve their promise leaves a lot to be desired. This is not in line with the AU Declaration: the current women's representation in the parliament is

35%, an increase of only 5% compared to the increase of women parliamentarians from 21.5% in 2000 election to 30.3% in the 2005 election.

Conclusion and way forward

Notwithstanding some key major achievements, it is obvious that the commitment towards women's political empowerment is facing many challenges, including the way it is (or is not) mainstreamed in the political agenda. It's important to note that the quota system or system of "reserve seats for women" as Professor Ruth Meena termed it, will only work where there is a political commitment to promoting gender equality. Political parties' commitment to the agenda is also important, as it will allow women's wings to work within the framework of political parties to push for more women's participation before expanding it to the parliamentary level. The decision to ensure gender parity in political participation requires a more holistic approach which will address the underlying causes of discrimination in the broader context. In the political sphere, the discourse has to move beyond numbers to also address ideological positionality and the broader issues of transformation of a politics of exclusion. While numbers are useful benchmarks, they are only the beginning of measuring women's equitable participation in decision making organs. From this conclusion the following recommendations are put forward:

- i. Constitutional reform (a new constitution) is crucial in order to address the whole electoral system and address legal and policy frameworks so as to make politics truly democratic, including, for example, removing the financial barriers to participation, stating clearly the goal of 50% women's representation in public office and offering clear strategies to achieve this.
- ii. Political will, which will then translate to the development of a new constitution, hold political parties accountable to be required by law to practice internal democracy or to institute affirmative action to support the historically excluded groups such as women in decision making organs. Most importantly, the international commitments which have been translated into national policy frameworks, laws and regulations must be put into practice.
- iii. Autonomous women wings/committee within political parties are internal party sections that aim to strengthen women's representation within the party and in the political process in general. Often, women's wings help promote women's interests in party policy platforms and strengthen the demand for increasing women's representation in party nomination lists and decision making processes. Achieving gender parity, therefore, needs to start from within political parties. It is high time for parties to provide independent spaces for women. The Women's League of the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa is a case in point.
- iv. Timely financial support for women contestants both in capacity building and during campaigning is of importance to address women candidates' relative lack of access to resources due to their low economic status and lack of economically powerful networks to support them accessing campaign resources. New candidates need exposure and understanding of the campaign strategy: this initial stage is normally self sponsored and can disadvantage women who are not economically powerful. And yet, experience elsewhere, such as the Democratic Party in the USA and the Labor Party in Australia demonstrates that timely support has made a big difference to women's chances of winning elections.

- v. Global South and North women's solidarity in terms of experience sharing and strategizing on how best to push for more women participation in decision making structures and on what works best in different contexts is also critical. The Mná Sasa Manifesto by feminist community activists in Tanzania and Ireland is the case in point here. It came out clearly in the Manifesto that Irish and Tanzania grassroots women's issues and struggles are connected, given their shared herstories of patriarchy and colonialism in a refusal to accept the deepening injustices we witness against women. Through the power of collective voices and stories grassroots global women's solidarity in challenging patriarchy and neo-liberalism can to a large extent contribute to attaining gender parity in decision making, starting from the grassroots level.

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