Consolidated Response

iKNOW politics

International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics

Introduction

Despite comprising more than 50 percent of the world's population, women continue to lack access to political leadership opportunities and resources at all levels of government. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy, but a necessary pre-condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Governance structures which do not result in the equal participation of men and women, or their equal enjoyment of benefits from state interventions are by definition neither inclusive nor democratic.

In 2007, recognizing that over the last century women's gains in the political arena have been slow and inadequate, five international organizations came together to make women's political participation their collective priority and devise a strategy that would scale-up each of the organization's efforts to foster gender equality in politics:

> International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)
> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
> National Democratic Institute (NDI)
> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (www.iKNOWPolitics.org) is an online network, jointly supported by the five partner organizations, that aims to increase the participation and effectiveness of women in political life by utilizing a technology-enabled forum to provide access to critical resources and expertise, stimulate dialogue, create knowledge, and share experiences among women in politics.

In just three years, iKNOW Politics has become the leading website on women's political participation. Building on a library of over 5300 resources, iKNOW Politics has captured the combined experience and knowledge of its 92 global experts and 10,000 members from over 150 countries. iKNOW Politics has documented and disseminated the lessons and best practices of women as voters, candidates and elected legislators.

The following is a printed version of one of the most frequently-cited iKNOW Politics knowledge products, based on the combined input from experts and members worldwide. Please visit the iKNOW Politics website to pose a question of your own, contribute to the online discussions, browse the resource library or read additional iKNOW Politics consolidated expert responses, E-discussion summaries, interviews with women leaders, or contact iKNOW Politics at connect@iknowpolitics.org to get in touch with a staff member in your region of the world. iKNOW Politics is available in **English, French, Spanish** and **Arabic**.

Consolidated Response on the Rise of Women in Parliaments in Sub-Saharan Africa

Question

What are the factors explaining the rise of women in parliaments in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Introduction

Although women have historically played an essential role in politics, revolutionary struggles, and public life in Sub-Saharan Africa, since the early 1990s the number of women in African parliaments has increased significantly. Several countries in the region, such as Rwanda, Mozambique, Burundi, and South Africa, have greater representation of women in parliaments, even when compared to countries with more advanced democracies. For example, with 48.8% of women elected in parliament, Rwanda reached the highest percentage of women's parliamentary representation in the world, even higher than the 45.3% achieved by Sweden.

In this consolidated response, iKNOW Politics experts and staff highlight a number of factors stimulating the advancement of women in politics in Africa, including gender quotas in politics, national women's movements, and the spillover effect of democratic values throughout the continent.

Gender Quotas

The responses received from the iKNOW Politics experts, as well as supplemental research, indicate that the rise of women in parliaments in Sub-Saharan Africa may be explained in part by the introduction of electoral gender quotas in the region. Gretchen Bauer, iKNOW Politics Expert and Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Delaware, points out that in most African countries the quotas have been effective and have secured the election of the desired percentage of women in parliaments, unlike in many countries where the quotas are created but never followed. (Bauer, G. Expert Opinion) "Between 2000 and 2002, elections were held in 23 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, with increases in women parliamentarians in 14 of them. Most of the countries that have achieved significant increases in women's participation have done so through the use of quotas." (Mutume, G. 2004)

Some researchers and experts suggest a close correlation between electoral systems and the successful introduction of quotas. For example, quotas seem to be most easily introduced in proportional representation (PR) systems and other multi-list systems. (Dahlerup, D. p13) According to the data from the Global Database of Quotas for Women, five out of the six African countries with the highest percentages of women in parliament have proportional representation electoral systems. Parties that act as gate-keepers of elections are more inclined and able to fulfill their gender quota requirements. In her expert opinion, Bauer also notes "If one looks at all of these cases in Africa, one will also note that these are dominant party political systems. And in all cases it is the dominant or ruling parties that have accepted or even proposed the electoral gender quotas."(Bauer, G. Expert Opinion)

Country	Quota Type(s)	Results last election	% of women in parliament
Rwanda *Africa* - List PR	Constitutional Quota for National Parliaments ; Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament ; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Sub-National Level	39 of 80	48.8%
Mozambique *Africa* - List PR	Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	87 of 250	34.8%
South Africa *Africa* - List PR	Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Sub-National Level ; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	131 of 400	32.8%
Burundi *Africa* - List PR	Constitutional Quota for National Parliaments ; Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament	36 of 118	30.5%
Tanzania, United Republic of *Africa* - FPTP	Constitutional Quota for National Parliaments ; Election Law Quota Regulation, National Parliament ; Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Sub-National Level	97 of 319	30.4%
Namibia *Africa* - List PR	Constitutional or Legislative Quota, Sub-National Level ; Political Party Quota for Electoral Candidates	21 of 78	26.9%

Data Derived from the Global Database of Quotas for Women:
http://www.quotaproject.org/country.cfm?SortOrder=electoralSystem

representation electoral systems. Parties that act as gate-keepers of elections are more inclined and able to fulfill their gender quota requirements. In her expert opinion, Bauer also notes "If one looks at all of these cases in Africa, one will also note that these are dominant party political systems. And in all cases it is the dominant or ruling parties that have accepted or even proposed the electoral gender quotas."(Bauer, G. Expert Opinion)

Many of the countries and parties that have not adopted formal gender quotas have started to employ other financial and legal means to promote women's participation in politics. In Mali, the government accepted a notion giving priority in funding to the political parties that have a large female component and ensure that at least 10% of their candidates are women. (Diouf, M. and Ivory,C. p.2) Although this regulation does not establish a formal requirement for party quotas, it does provide the financial incentive for parties to ensure that at least 10% of the candidates in the party lists are women.

"When the civil war broke out in my country, I decided to return home to join the struggle against dictatorship. I got a job with an airline company, while I worked clandestinely to support the growing resistance. I became a member of the National Resistance Movement. …
After the end of the civil war and after serving as Uganda's Deputy Permanent Delegate to UNESCO for five years, I decided to return home to run in the parliamentary elections. Although I had seen women living in the war zones and struggling with poverty before, the elections brought me face to face with the situation of poor women in my country in a very real way. I went through three elections in Uganda and in the first elections I got over 80% of women's votes"

Derived from the iKNOW Politics' interview with Winnie Byanyima, Director of UNDP Gender Team/ Bureau for Development Policy
[http://iknowpolitics.org/en/node/2679]

Considering the scarcity of resources and dependence of political parties on public funding, such an incentive may be a decisive factor in promoting women in party lists during major elections. Other countries have increased women's political participation by reforming national laws on parties and electoral systems. A great example of such reforms is South Africa, which in April of 1994 changed its electoral system from the First Past the Post (FPTP) system to the List PR system. Many observers claimed that a PR system, as an integral part of other power-sharing mechanisms in the new constitution, was crucial to creating the atmosphere of inclusiveness and reconciliation. It also secured 25% of parliamentary seats for women in South Africa. (Reynolds, A. p. 67)

National Liberation and Women's Movements

Women played a critical role in the liberation and reform movements in Africa throughout the early 1990s. They actively participated in the underground struggle, contributed to clandestine movements, and garnered people's support for liberation and democratization of their countries. Women also were proactive in forming and leading women's movements throughout the region.

"Although rarely mentioned in studies of democratization in Africa, women's movements actively sought to participate in the political reform movements of the 1990s and in many cases found themselves the only group defying repression by the authorities" (Tripp, A. 2006) To ensure that women's issues and political views were considered appropriately, many women started their own political parties and became involved in creating new legislative frameworks. "During the political transitions new constitutions were drafted and new laws written and women's groups and mobilized national women's movements took advantage of these political openings to make their demands for greater or equal political participation and representation." (Bauer, G. Expert Opinion) Some experts also suggest that African liberation and women's movements were influenced by the political culture and democratic ideologies of western European countries, and specifically affirmative action groups. Such an exposure to inclusive and democratic ideology was another factor that surely affected women's roles and contributions to the liberation and democratization processes in their countries.

Women's involvement in political movements led to the creation of women's organizations further promoted women's work in Sub-Saharan Africa. Such organizations as Women in Nigeria (WIN), the Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE) in Uganda, the 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone, and Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) have been working to empower women and promote them to decision-making positions by providing advocacy, training, and access to resources and information. For instance, the 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone, which emerged during the post-war reconstruction period, advocates for the inclusion and empowerment of women in governance and decision-making at all levels in Africa through intensive leadership and campaign training.

The work of women's NGOs, the support of international donors, and political changes in Sub-Saharan Africa converged and led to the formation of a cohort of women who not only have strong leadership and organizational skills, but also possess a desire to take-up decision-making roles. Edith Miguda, iKNOW Politics expert and Fellow at the Centre for Women's Intercultural Leadership at Saint Mary's College, emphasizes that "a strong tradition of leadership and community work among women in Africa including women's organizations and grassroots women's movements has allowed some women to tap into skills associated with political leadership, but even more particularly offered occasion for female candidates to build a strong support base among women as voters for female candidates." (Miguda, E. Expert Opinion) Women's successful participation in political movements and NGOs has demonstrated to people in Africa that women are capable of making changes, bringing peace and security, and

participating in important decision-making processes.

Spillover Effect

The explosion of women's movements and of international agreements on women's rights and gender equality has most likely had a significant spillover effect on women's advancement in politics in Sub-Saharan Africa. There is no doubt that the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other international treaties, UN conferences and conventions have been essential in shaping the norms driving the women's movements in Africa. (Tripp, A. 2006) African women have organized and held several post-Beijing regional conferences throughout the continent to plan for increased women's socio-economic and political empowerment. For example, at the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women to Assess Progress in the Implementation of the Beijing and African Platforms for Action, held in Addis Ababa in 1999, women activists and participants urged the African governments to provide needed resources and effective mechanisms to secure women's rights and to implement commitments made under the Beijing Platform for Action. Involving women in traditional methods of resolving conflicts and promoting the participation of women in conflict-resolution were important recommendations made by the participants of the conference.

These efforts were taken even further at the Seventh African Regional Conference on Women held in Addis Ababa in October 2004, which was convened to review the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action. At this conference, the participants extensively discussed and made specific recommendations on increasing the number of women in governance and creating institutional mechanisms for effective gender mainstreaming into national policies and programmes in Africa. Afia Zakiya, iKNOW Politics expert and Senior Program Manager at NDI, mentions that the activism of African women and their lobbying for women's political participation at the local, national and international levels have secured higher numbers of women in parliaments and political parties, and led to the creation of Women's Affairs ministries that now have the mandate to promote gender sensitive policies. (Zakiya, A. Expert Opinion).

At the same time, during the political transition processes in the early 1990s, western donors and international organizations invested in building and strengthening civil society in Africa. For many of these donors, gender integration was an important focus of both internal and external mandates. Due to these efforts, gender equality and women's empowerment became a part of

Africa's development agenda. This led to the creation of multiple women's organizations and movements that had the resources to promote their goals and raise a cohort of women leaders capable of running and winning public offices. According to Harriett Turay, President of the 50/50 Group of Sierra Leone, the recognition of women's roles in consolidating peace in Africa by UN and humanitarian agencies strengthened the work of women and women's organizations in addressing gender issues in the region. (Turay, H. Expert Response) The active work of women's movements and organizations had a spillover effect on all levels of politics throughout the continent.

Conclusion

The rise of women's political participation in Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the key steps in the overall democratization process in the region. African women were always active in the social and public life in their countries, supporting revolutionary movements, and securing vital resources for their families and communities. However, it was not until the early 1990s that women began to assert their political rights and claim decision-making positions more formally. The increased numbers of women in parliaments in the region can be explained by various factors, amongst which iKNOW Politics experts highlight the implementation of quotas, involvement of women in national liberation and women's movements, and the spillover of democratic values and practices throughout the continent. Although each of the above-mentioned factors significantly contributed to women's political empowerment, it was the will and confidence of great women leaders in Africa that made these changes real and effective.

Further Reading

Karam, Azza. Women Political Participation and Good Governance: 21st Century Challenges. Chapter: Review of Strategies and Trends. Publisher: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2000. http://www.iknowpolitics.org/en/node/126

Dahlerup, Drude. Comparative Studies of Electoral Gender Quotas. Publisher: Quota Project. 2003. http://www.quotaproject.org/CS/CS_Dahlerup_25-11-2003.pdf

Skomand, Sven. Scandinavian Opposition to Apartheid. Publisher: African National Congress. 1970. http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/solidarity/scanopp.html

Tripp, Mari Aili. Transnational Feminism: Despite Africa's Continued Woes, Great Strides are Being Made in Women's Participation in Decision-Making Structures. Publisher: Catholic New Times. April 9, 2006. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0MKY/is_6_30/ai_n16128126

Reynolds, Andrew. South Africa: Electoral System Design and Conflict Management in Africa. Publisher: International IDEA. http://www.idea.int/esd/upload/south_africa.pdf

Diouf, Marie Jeanne and Ivory, Christine. Women's leadership in Parliament: Increasing the number and impact of women. Publisher: African Network for the Promotion of Women in Parliament. Publisher: Parliamentary Center. 2006. http://www.parlcent.ca/africa/Gender/docs/Report%20VC%20Gender%20network%20Feb%202006.pdf

Miguda, Edith. "Expert Opinion on the question rela ted to Rise of Women in Parliaments in Sub-Saharan Africa". 2008. http://www.iknowpolitics.org/en/node/4896

Zakiya, Afia. "Expert Opinion on the question relat ed to Rise of Women in Parliaments in Sub-Saharan Africa". 2008. http://www.iknowpolitics.org/en/node/4895

Bauer, Gretchen. "Expert Opinion on the question re lated to Rise of Women in Parliaments in Sub-Saharan Africa". 2008. http://www.iknowpolitics.org/en/node/4894

Turay, Harriett. "Expert Opinion on the question re lated to Rise of Women in Parliaments in Sub-Saharan Africa". 2008. http://www.iknowpolitics.org/en/node/4897

iKNOW Politics' Interview with Winnie Byanyima, Director of UNDP Gender Team/ Bureau for Development Policy. 2007. http://iknowpolitics.org/en/node/2679

Declaration of the Sixth African Regional Conference on Women. Publisher: UNECA. 2000. http://www.uneca.org/eca_resources/Major_ECA_Websites/beijingplus5/index.htm

Mitumi, Gumisai. Women break into African politics. Publisher: Kubatana. October, 2004. http://www.kubatana.net/html/archive/women/041028gm.asp?sector=WOMEN&year=2004&range_start=1.