



## Policy Brief 03/2020

### Prospects for the realization of 50-50 gender representation in Zimbabwean politics

*By Cowen Dziva (PhD), Tutuma Gender and Rights Policy Fellow*

#### Summary

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, Zimbabwe joined the rest of the world to commemorate the 2020 International Women's Day. This year's edition runs under the theme: "I am generation equality: realizing women's rights." Influenced by the United Nations Women's new multigenerational campaign dubbed: "Generation Equality", the celebrations remind everyone to realize how diversity makes the society better placed to work towards equality, sustainable development and the consolidation of democracy. The theme is a wake-up call for state parties and other actors to work towards 50-50 representation of women and men in politics and decision making circles. As political institutions in Zimbabwe remain male-bloated, this policy paper envisions the prospects for the Southern African nation to realize 50-50 representation of women and men in political spheres. The paper starts by outlining the rationale and gender equality status quo in Zimbabwean politics before it envisions the prospects for realization of gender equality. The paper concludes with some thoughts on what it takes for Zimbabwe to turn the highlighted prospects into the actual realization the 50-50 representation of men and women in politics.

#### Policy recommendations

- 1. The state, and its institutions must take a lead in ensuring 50-50 gender parity in both elected and unelected positions**
- 2. Political parties must institute policies that incrementally allow for 50-50 parity in both elected and unelected positions.**
- 3. The National Gender Policy (2017-2022) should be a public document embraced by both state and non-state institutions.**
- 4. The state and non-state actors should promote constitutional awareness for citizens at all levels of the society to understand and embrace 50-50 representation.**
- 5. There must be a deliberate effort to involve men in the push for 50-50 in accordance with the UNWomen HeforShe campaign.**

#### Situating gender equality in democratisation

Democratic societies put value and worth to every citizen regardless of their sex and gender. In its true sense, democracy is just, inclusive and non-discriminatory of other persons on the basis of neither their sex nor gender. Women and men should therefore be equally represented in political and decision making circles. By itself, women and men's inclusion and participation in public life allows them to represent their interests and concerns. Resultantly, governance outcomes are expected to positively improve under inclusive institutions.

Influenced by the need to promote and entrench democratic values of justice, equality and inclusiveness, the United Nations and regional bodies came up with several human rights and development mechanisms that call upon state parties to ensure gender equality in all facets of life. A cohort of the United Nations initiated mechanisms include the Sustainable Development Goals (2015); the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1979); and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), all which emphasize on justice, gender equality and non-discrimination.

Concomitantly, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Charter), and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (referred to as the Maputo Protocol) make the core gender instruments at regional level. Specifically, article 9 of the Maputo Protocol guarantees the chance for men and women to equally participate and be represented in public life.<sup>1</sup> The Protocol has, for containing such clear cut clauses for women's inclusion and representation in politics, been hailed as a comprehensive and well-thought framework when it comes to the protection of women rights.<sup>2</sup>

As a state party to these UN and regional mechanisms, Zimbabwe can be applauded for its attempt to domesticate and implement such instruments for greater gender equality in society. Since attaining its independence at 1980, Zimbabwe embarked on widespread policy, legal and institutional reforms to ensure 50-50 representation in governance circles. Most notably, the government came up with the National Gender Policy and the Constitution, all which clearly speak to gender quality in the same way with articles 7 and 9 of CEDAW and Maputo Protocol respectively. More so, empowerment programmes<sup>3</sup> have been implemented with a view to improve women's capacities for greater participation in socio-economic and political life.

Despite having these mechanisms in place, women's representation in key appointed and elected positions keeps on decreasing. Following the 2013 elections in Zimbabwe, the numbers of elected women fell from 19% in 2008 to 16%<sup>4</sup> in 2013 for local authorities while the figures for parliament also decreased as follows: 34% in 2008; 26 in 2013 and 25% for 2018.<sup>5;6</sup> At the moment (2018-2023), Zimbabwe has no women representative in the presidium. Even with a slight improvement of women representation in the present cabinet from disappointing 11% in 2013 to 34% in 2018, the numbers remain way below the 50-50 mark. This trend of male-bloated institutions also transcends to many other appointed decision making positions within

---

<sup>1</sup> Maputo Protocol.

<sup>2</sup> EF Zvobgo & C Dziva 'Practices and challenges in implementing women's right to political participation under the African Women's Rights Protocol in Zimbabwe' (2017) 1 African Human Rights Yearbook 60-81  
<http://doi.org/10.29053/2523-1367/2017/v1n1a4>

<sup>3</sup> Empowerment efforts initiated in Zimbabwe since 2000 include the creation of Women's Bank; The Land Reform Programme; Indigenization and Economic Empowerment amongst others.

<sup>4</sup> Gender Links *SADC Gender Protocol Barometer 2013 Zimbabwe* (Gender Links: Johannesburg 2015)

<sup>5</sup> D Tshuma, Looking Beyond 2023: What Next After Zimbabwe's Parliamentary Quota System? Conflict Trends, Issue 3, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Gender Links (as above)

government and political parties. While this gender inequality in appointed positions reveal the limited political will on appointing officers to ensure 50-50 gender representation, the paltriness of women in elected positions largely speaks to the uneven playing field in which women compete with men during elections. As previous studies have shown, women in Zimbabwe grapple with a myriad of challenges including marauding poverty which manifests in resource constraints, limited education and information, which all work to limit women's triumph in electoral contests.<sup>7;8</sup> Thus, many decision making institutions remain male-bloated.<sup>9</sup>

## Prospects for 50-50 representation in Zimbabwe

Despite these low figures, there remain prospects for 50-50 representation of women and men in Zimbabwean politics. The fact that Zimbabwe has a progressive constitution and the National Gender Policy<sup>10</sup> continuously gives hope to broad-minded citizens that gender equality can be realised. The National Gender Policy boldly speaks to women representation in all decision making circles.<sup>11</sup> Together with other national policies that speak to women empowerment, the Gender Policy directs state and non-state actors to improve women's lives for greater inclusion and representation in public life.

Similarly, this paper found the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe to be a powerful document that argues a case for 50-50 representation of men and women in decision making circles. This optimism hinges on sections 3(g); 17; 56 and 80<sup>12</sup> of the Constitution, all which explicitly guarantee equal human rights for women and men, including in decision making circles. It categorically states that the state must take necessary actions, including legislative measures, to ensure that 'both genders are equally represented in all institutions and agencies of government at every level'.<sup>13</sup> Further to that, the state is mandated to make sure that 'women constitute at least half the membership of all Commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established by or under this constitution or any act of parliament'.<sup>14</sup>

The Constitution accords women's equality alongside a cohort of other civil liberties provided under Chapter 4 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (The Bill of Rights), which includes the freedom of association, expression and assembly. These liberties are crucial for the effective realization of women's equal political participation.<sup>15</sup> Having such progressive constitutional clauses provide an impetus for women on their own, through their movements and via the courts, to question exclusion and advocate for inclusion in public life.

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> EF Zvobgo & C Dziva (as above).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The National Gender Policy (2013-2017) (Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development: Harare 2013) [www.women.gov.zw/downloads?download=3:2013-national-gender-policy](http://www.women.gov.zw/downloads?download=3:2013-national-gender-policy) (accessed 20 June 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Section 50 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

<sup>13</sup> Section 17 (b) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> EF Zvobgo & C Dziva (as above).

Through sections 104; 120 and 124, the Constitution also provides for women's increased representation in decision making institutions. Under section 104 (4)<sup>16</sup>, the President is constantly reminded to consider gender balance in appointing Ministers and Deputy Ministers.<sup>17</sup> The Constitution under section 120 further provide for senators to be elected based on a party list in which women and men are listed on an alternating basis, with women always topping the list. Similarly, section 124<sup>18</sup> of the Constitution provides for reservation of 60 women seats in the House of National Assembly. This quota system only applies to the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> parliaments, effectively meaning that it will not be applicable beyond 2023. A glance at statistics after the 2018 elections clearly shows that the overall representation of women improved to 35% for parliament and to around 48% for senate, courtesy of the constitutional quotas.<sup>19</sup> Despite the quota system having failed to surpass the 50-50 representation, and being criticized for othering women in politics<sup>20</sup>, the prerogative has the potential to overall increase women's numbers in politics and key decision making positions.

Against this backdrop, many have welcomed the Constitutional Amendment Number 2, which, besides controversial proposals<sup>21</sup>, seeks to extend the life of women's quota in Parliament beyond 2023. If this amendment is to be passed, it is likely to guarantee increased women's representation in Parliament. It is also expected that the alignment of laws to the Constitution underway in Zimbabwe will include clauses that make it mandatory for political parties to field gender balanced candidates in elections or rather reserve certain constituencies for women to contest against each other in National Assembly and local authority. Having such mandatory clauses in place will go a long way to force political parties to complement constitutional quotas in working towards 50-50 representation of women and men in internal party structures and the government.

The goal to realize 50-50 representation of women in decision making requires the efforts of every stakeholder. There is, therefore, need for civil society organizations to continuously advocate for constitutional and mandatory party quotas in all male-bloated decision making bodies including local governance and the presidium. Likewise, CSOs must join hands with like-minded state aligned institutions including the Ministry responsible for women affairs, and national commissions namely: the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission and the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) to capacitate and improve women's knowledge and resource needs to take-up decision making positions. Similarly, the wider society must be enlightened on the basis for quotas and above all the importance of wider gender equality move. With adequate funding, and many activities of this nature, all levels of the society will understand the need for

---

<sup>16</sup> Section 104 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

<sup>17</sup> See Section 104 (4) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

<sup>18</sup> Section 124 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

<sup>19</sup> Gender Links (as above).

<sup>20</sup> Tshuma, D. Looking Beyond 2023: What Next After Zimbabwe's Parliamentary Quota System? Conflict Trends, Issue 3, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> The controversial proposals sought by the Constitutional Amendment No. 2 relates to the appointment of the Prosecutor General and that of the judges of the superior courts amongst other proposals.

women representation and quotas in a more positive way as opposed to viewing such quotas as mere tokenism for sacrificing 'quality over quantity'.<sup>22</sup>

Importantly, UN Women, realizing and in appreciation of the feminists' efforts towards gender parity, came to the conclusion that the fight for women rights is a fight for human rights. It cannot therefore, be implemented without men and boys' participation. They state that "Men and boys need to be part of the global movement to promote women rights both as advocates and stakeholders, who need to change to make gender equality a reality for all. This is not about women or men, it is about crafting a shared vision of human progress for all – about creating a solidarity movement between women and men for the achievement of gender equality."<sup>23</sup> It is therefore, critical that Zimbabwe embraces this new methodology towards 50-50. Societies can no longer promote only the boy child, patriarchal privilege must be abhorred at household level for the future to guarantee naturalization of 50-50 gender parity.

### **Conclusion and Policy Options**

It is a reality that women remain underrepresented in decision making bodies in Zimbabwe. Despite the decreased numbers of women in elected and appointed decision making positions in Zimbabwe, there is hope and the zeal to achieve the 50-50 representation as set forth by international best practices. The hope for many Zimbabweans is pinned on the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe, which is progressive and speak highly of women's participation in public life. With the Constitutional Amendment under way to expand the life span of the women's constitutional quota in Zimbabwe, there is a possibility for guaranteed women representation in the House of Assembly. The women's movement, CSOs, the ZGC, ZEC and the ZHRC are implored to also take advantage of the alignment of laws to the Constitution and best international practices under way to continuously advocate, litigate and lobby for a raft of measures including the insertion of legal binding clauses and practices that largely ensure equal representation of men and women in key decision making circles.

Concomitantly, the preceding discussion on the decreasing number of women in elected positions clearly decipher quotas to be an important starting point, which should be sustained with efforts to undo the structural barriers that limit women's success in politics. As such, there must be widespread efforts to level the electoral playing field between women and men through awareness raising, discouraging of violence, empowerment and capacity building of women to take up leadership positions in politics and decision making circles.

---

<sup>22</sup> Gender Links (as above)

<sup>23</sup> UN Women (2020), 'Engaging Men'