

# **BIDPA POLICY BRIEF No. 13**

## **GENDER AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN BOTSWANA**

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## **About BIDPA**

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## GENDER AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN BOTSWANA

The objective of this policy brief is to examine the factors influencing the level of participation of women in the electoral process in Botswana. It compares such participation with other Southern African jurisdictions and further explores the legal, institutional, economic, political, and cultural factors that influence such participation. Women in Botswana are poorly represented in decision making bodies such as parliament and cabinet where national socio-economic decisions are made and national priorities set. The underrepresentation of women, who make 52% of the national population, in political positions has far reaching implications. Equal participation of men and women in decision making is a necessary course for social, political and economic development. Inclusive and participatory development is desirable for both developing and developed countries. As a democratic nation Botswana's elective bodies should be seen to represent the nation's diverse perspectives and interests. Furthermore the country must offer equal economic opportunities to all citizens.

Gender equality is the measurable equal representation of women and men. Contrary to the common misconception "gender equality does not necessarily mean that men and women are the same, but that they have equal value and should be accorded equal treatment"<sup>1</sup>. Gender equality is perceived as an end in itself as it is a human right; and as a means to an end, it is also included as one of the Millennium Development Goals. Furthermore, gender equality has been linked to strong governance, economic growth, improved health and education and better distribution of resources<sup>2</sup>.

When compared to men, women in Botswana are disadvantaged due to traditional roles and perceptions. As a result women have suffered various forms of discrimination, inequality and sometimes exclusion. This has created grounds for constitutional and policy changes to empower and include women in political and economic processes. There have also been

some international treaties on protecting and promoting the rights of women. However, implementation of such instruments is dependent on individual countries. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) obligates states to eliminate discrimination against women, guaranteeing women fundamental rights and liberties in the political, social and economic spheres. As a CEDAW signatory Botswana has committed to upholding the rights of women.

Botswana is one of Africa's unquestioned top performers in many governance indicators. The country has performed highly in terms of political and economic development. Illustrations include the country being named the least corrupt in Africa, observing the rule of law, growing to the status of middle income country, guaranteeing regular elections and basic human rights and freedoms and maintaining a system of checks and balances among its three branches of the state. Nonetheless, Botswana has the lowest rate of participation and representation of women in politics in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. While the situation has improved in terms of the presence of women in managerial positions in the public sector (see figure 1) women are poorly represented in local government (see table 1) parliament (see table 2) and cabinet. Currently only 4 out of 61 members of parliament are women. Of these, only 2 were voted in open electoral contest while the other 2 were brought into parliament as special nominees. The special nomination vote was not necessarily designed to bring women into parliament but to bring in relevant knowledge and expertise.

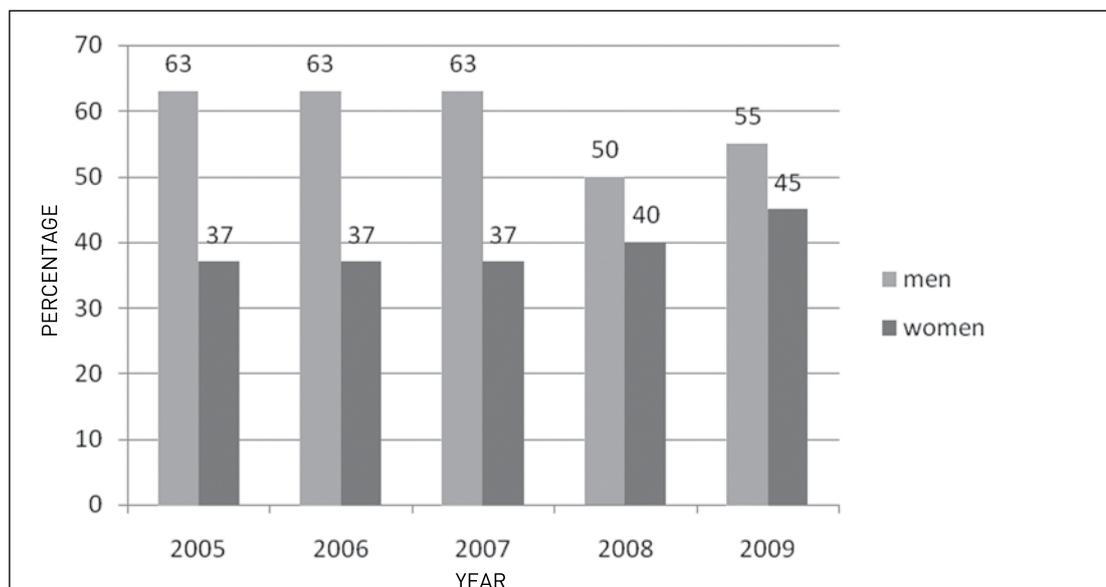
While women form the majority of the country's population, their representation in decision making bodies is not proportional to their numerical strength. Women in Botswana also vote more than men but still remain underrepresented, for instance, 311, 265 women registered to vote in 2004 compared to 239,148 men. In 2009, 404, 238 women registered to vote compared to 321, 534 men<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://ippt.org/our-work/what-we-do/gender/what-gender-equality>

<sup>2</sup> [http://worldsavvy.org/monitor/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=619&Itemid=1067](http://worldsavvy.org/monitor/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=619&Itemid=1067)

<sup>3</sup> EISA 2009 Parliamentary and Local Government Elections Report

**Figure 1: Women’s Share of Senior Management Positions in the Public Service**



Source: Millennium Development Goals Status Report

Botswana is doing well in terms of women in senior management positions in government. Figure 1 above shows an increase of 8% in women’s share of senior management positions in the Public Service between 2007 and 2009. It is interesting to note that this growth is not in any way related to the use of quotas or affirmative action policies.

However, it is not surprising because the level of education attainment for women is high in Botswana. The Millennium Development Goals Status Report 2010 shows that there is parity in access to primary and secondary education between boys and girls<sup>4</sup>.

**Table 1: Representation in Councils by Gender**

Name of Council	Type of local Authority	Total number of Councillors	No. of Female Councillors	% of women	% of men
Gaborone	City	35	7	20.0%	80.0%
Francistown	City	22	5	22.7%	77.3%
Selibe Phikwe	Town	16	3	18.8%	81.3%
Jwaneng	Town	8	1	12.5%	87.5%
Lobatse	Town	13	5	35.7%	64.3%
Sowa	Township	7	3	42.9%	57.1%
North West	District	48	5	9.1%	90.9%
North East	District	23	5	21.7%	78.3%
South East	District	23	4	18.2%	81.8%
Southern	District	62	12	19.4%	80.6%
Kgatleng	District	27	4	14.8%	85.2%
Kweneng	District	78	15	19.2%	80.8%
Central	District	172	38	22.1%	77.9%
Gantsi	District	24	6	25.0%	75.0%
Kgalagadi	District	26	2	7.7%	92.3%
Chobe	District	7	1	14.3%	85.7%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>591</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>19.4%</b>	<b>80.6%</b>

Source: First Draft, Botswana Councillor Handbook, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2009

<sup>4</sup> Government of Botswana and United Nations (2010) Millennium Development Goals Status Report

Representation of women is better at local government level as compared to parliament and cabinet. Table 1 shows that the representation of women at local government level stands at 19%.

**Table 2: Percentage of Women in Parliament: 1989-2009**

Year	Total Seats	Women's seats	% women
2009	61	4	7
2004	61	7	11
1999	44	8	18
1994	44	4	9
1989	38	2	5

Source: adapted from EISA (2010)

The number of women in parliament has continued to decline over the years. As shown in table 2 above representation of women in parliament has dropped from 18% in 1999 to 7% in 2009. This is far below the 50% SADC threshold. However, positive progress was made between 1989 and 1999 as an increase of 13% was recorded.

Despite the continuous decline of women representation in parliament neither the law nor the constitution of Botswana makes provision for quotas or affirmative action measures to enhance or ensure women's representation in decision making bodies. Furthermore, the Botswana government has not ratified the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development; this has been interpreted as government's lack of commitment to women's rights and their political participation.

A number of reasons have been advanced for the poor representation of women in Parliament. Specific reasons include the following<sup>5</sup>:

- Electoral campaigns are expensive. Women's inferior economic means in comparison to men disadvantages them;
- Lack of state funding of political parties exacerbates the situation as it entrenches existing economic inequalities<sup>6</sup>;

- Women tend to shy away from politics because of the attitudes of men who disrespect them by using harsh and derogatory words against them during campaigns;
- Women are patronized by their communities as 'society does not see women as leaders therefore women do not see themselves as leaders in their own right'. (Ntseane, 2005)<sup>7</sup>.

The electoral system in place also negatively affects the representation of women in parliament. Botswana has used the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system since its inception of electoral democracy. This system has served the country well as it has produced a stable and strong government that efficiently implements policy. Notwithstanding this, an electoral system needs to be constantly reviewed and reformed to accommodate changes and new challenges.

It has been established that countries with proportional representation systems tend to have higher women's representation as compared to countries with majority or plurality systems<sup>8</sup>. The proportional representation system has been noted as the most effective electoral system in increasing the number of women representatives in SADC countries (see table 3). Proportional representation allows political parties seats in proportion to their share of the national vote. Women stand a better chance of electoral representation with the proportional representation than other electoral systems, particularly the FPTP which is currently used in Botswana. The lack of legal measures compelling political parties to field female candidates, women's lack of resources, culture and societal attitudes as well as the government's inability to place more women in parliament exaggerates the ineffectiveness of the FPTP for Botswana.

<sup>5</sup> Africa Governance Report 3, Elections and Management of Diversity in Botswana (2012)

<sup>6</sup> Urban Women in Politics FGD, Gaborone, 10 November 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Ntseane D (2005) "Women in Politics", in Maundeni Z (ed.) 40 years of Democracy in Botswana 1965-2005, Mmegi Publishing House, Gaborone.

<sup>8</sup> Average representation of women of in 22 African countries using majority/plurality electoral systems stands at 15.5% compared to 27.4% in 12 countries using proportional representation <http://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/archive/questions/replies/165671188>

**Table 3: Women representation in selected SADC Parliaments**

Country	System	Year	% seats
Angola	Proportional Representation	2008	37.4
		1992	9.5
Botswana	Single Member Plurality	2009	6.56
		2004	11.48
		1999	18.18
		1994	9.09
		1989	5.26
Lesotho	Mixed Member Compensatory	2007	25
		2002	11.67
	Single Member Plurality	1993	4.6
Malawi	Single Member Plurality	2009	20.83
		2004	9.33
		1994	5.65
Mozambique	Proportional Representation	2009	38.4
		2004	35.6
		1999	29.2
		1994	25.2
Namibia	Proportional Representation	2009	22.22
		2004	25
		1999	29.2
		1994	25.2
South Africa	Proportional Representation	2009	43
		2004	32.75
		1999	30
		1994	27.74
Tanzania	Mixed Member Parallel	2005	29.97
	Single member plurality with gender quota	2000	21.51
		1995	16.73
	Single member plurality with reserved womens seats	1990	8.68
1985		9.62	

Table adapted from EISA <http://www.eisa.org.za/WEP/gen2006parliament.htm>

Scholars and opposition parties have called for the review of the electoral system. Arguments against the FPTP electoral system are; that it exaggerates electoral dominance of the ruling party, it is not responsive to changes in public opinion, and that it excludes minor political parties as well as some groups of the society such as women and ethnic minorities.

Beyond choosing the appropriate electoral system to improve representation of women other available options include the use of

quota systems. Quota systems can be employed at political party level or at national level, voluntarily and mandatorily. Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda are some of the African Countries with constitutional quotas. The constitutions provide for 30% special seats reserved for women in the National Assembly. This way some seats are reserved for women ensuring that at least there is some fair representation. The use of quotas as a measure of affirmative action used in some African countries has resulted in improved numbers

of women in local governance bodies and the national assembly.

Political parties have an important role to play in promoting women's participation in politics and decision making. A political party that is committed to equality can demonstrate it through party quotas. Fridell (2009) notes party quotas as less effective in countries with majority/plurality electoral systems<sup>9</sup>. Some political parties such as the BNF and BCP have in the past committed to providing 30% quotas for women but failed to implement the commitment. This is unfortunate because without any law or national policies to promote political representation of women, political parties remain the only viable option.

The BDP is a dominant and well resourced party which has more established stronghold constituencies as compared to other political parties. This means that women in the BDP stand better chances to win should they be afforded the much required support and opportunities. However, the BDP has shown very little commitment to advancing political representation of women both in practice and writing.

For any effective change regarding the empowerment of women to occur the women themselves need to be at the forefront articulating their needs and advocating for change, acting as catalysts for the change they would like to see.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations to enhance political participation and representation of women:

- Provide financial assistance to women candidates
- Provide financial incentives to political parties as a way of encouraging participation of women
- Introduce quotas and implement them at both political party and national level.
- Undertake a national referendum to determine an electoral system appropriate for the advancement and participation of women
- Implement legal and constitutional reforms to include women representation and gender equity issues

Enhancing Political representation of women requires changes within the political party systems, national policies and the legal framework to allow for the inclusion of women. It must be noted that the creation of opportunities for representation of women or the provision of political space for decision making does not necessarily translate into political influence or gender equity policies particularly in an environment where the government is yet to inculcate a gender sensitive perspective in its policy making. However, it would be a commendable effort and a starting point towards political empowerment of women.

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<sup>9</sup> Fridell (2009), Consolidated response on gender quotas in African countries <http://aceproject.org/electoral-advice/archive/questions/replies/165671188>

