



WOMEN IN LESOTHO POLITICS

Key targets

Lesotho is signatory to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development adopted by Heads of States in August 2008. The Protocol has 28 set targets for the achievement of gender equality by 2015. Moving from the 1997 Declaration on Gender and Development which set a target of 30% women in decision-making by 2005, the Gender Protocol has a specific target of 50% women in all areas of decision-making by 2015. The 50% target is in line with African Union targets. Lesotho has not yet ratified the protocol.

With 25.3% women in parliament, Lesotho has to employ extensive measures to improve the situation by the next general elections due in 2012. Although the country has not yet ratified the SADC Gender Protocol, it is imperative that such processes commence soon so as to enable full integration of the Protocol into national policies and programmes.



With 58% women in local government, the highest in the region, the main concern in the second local elections in Lesotho due in April 2010 is whether Lesotho will be able to retain or increase the current number of women elected candidates that came about as a result of a legislated quota coupled with the success of women at the polls.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

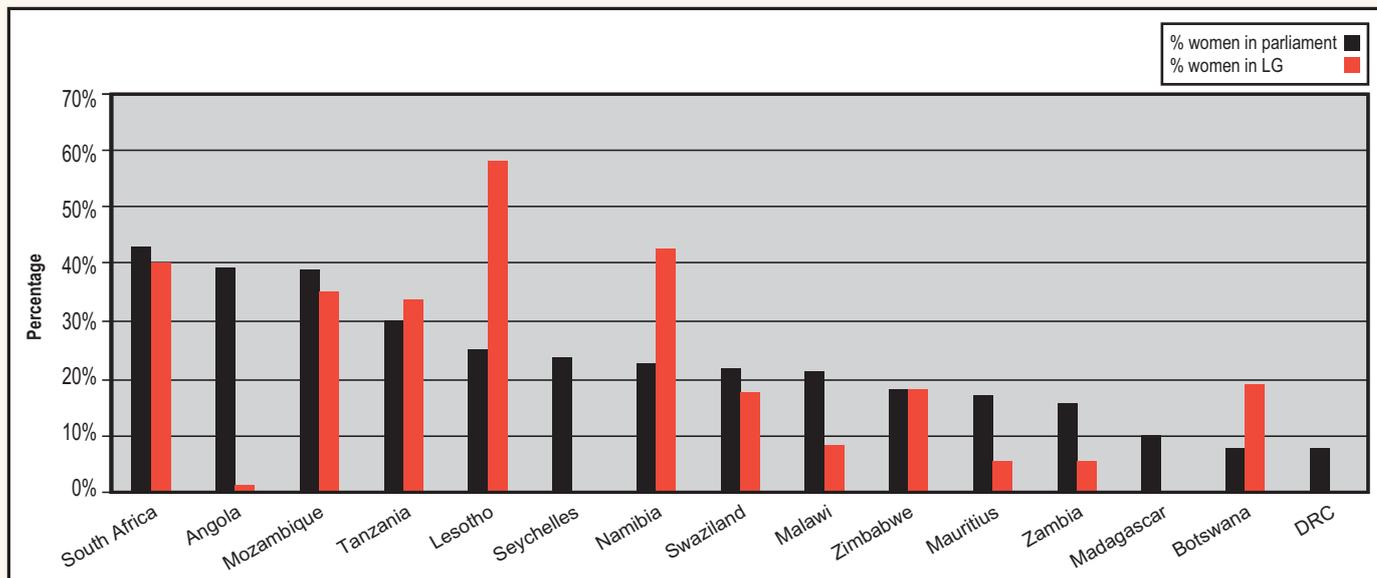
The Kingdom of Lesotho is a constitutional monarch that is landlocked and completely surrounded by the Republic of South Africa. King Letsie III is the Head of State and the leader of the majority party in the National Assembly is Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili. Since gaining its independence in October 1966, Lesotho adopted multi-party democracy system. There are 10 administrative districts: Botha Bothe, Leribe, Berea, Maseru, Mafeteng, Mohale's Hoek, Quthing, Qacha's Nek, Mokhotlong and Thaba-Tseka. The capital town is Maseru, where parliament is based. Several national assembly elections have been conducted over the years. In the 2007 elections, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) won 61 of 80 seats and became the ruling party.

Key facts

- Lesotho local government is guided by: Constitution of Lesotho section 106 (1) which essentially mandates parliament for the establishment of local government, the Local Government Act No.6 of 1997 that outlines institutional framework envisaged for local government and lastly the Local Government Elections Act of 1998 guiding on procedures, rules and regulations for the conduct of local election process.
- With amendments to both acts in 2004, Lesotho adopted legislated quota of one third of electoral division for women. This became the greatest issue in the poll during the 2005 local elections and it caused many men to boycott elections.
- This empowerment clause was considered by some people as discriminatory because it deprived men from contesting elections in electoral divisions designated for women. Despite speculation and uncertainty, 58% of women councillors were elected, the highest in the percentages in the region.
- There are no legislated quotas at national level.
- Local government consists of 1 Municipal Council, 10 District Councils and 128 Community Councils.
- Lesotho Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) is commissioned to organise, conduct and supervise national assembly and local government election procedure that is free, fair, transparent and accountable to Basotho nation.
- IEC operates independently and it is responsible for demarcation of electoral boundaries, voter registration, creating voters roll, voter education, registering of political parties, adjudicate disputes amongst its many functions.
- Section 26 (1) of the Local Government Elections Act provides for the 30% quota for women.
- Lesotho has over 18 registered political parties, many of which have not adopted voluntary quota for women within their party structures. Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD), National Independent Party (NIP), All Basotho Convention (ABC), Lesotho Workers Party (LWP); Basotho National Party (BNP), Alliance of Congress Parties (ACP), Basotho Batho Democratic Party (BBDP), Basotholand Congress Party (BCP), Basotho Democratic National Party (BDNP), and Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP) amongst others.
- Parliament of Lesotho comprises of Senate (Upper house) and National Assembly (Lower house). With its 33 members, Senate is not an elected chamber; it is made up of 22 Principal Chiefs and 11 elected members appointed by the King of which 32% are women. On the other hand, 120 members of the national assembly 26% of which are women, get elected through the mixed member proportion (MMP) system (two thirds are elected according to first past the post system (FPTP) where one member represents a constituency, one third through proportional representation).

- The high level of women in local government came about as a result of a legislated 30% quota. As local elections in Lesotho are run on a constituency basis the way this works is that 30% of constituencies are reserved for women in any given election. These rotate with each election. Women are free to contest with men in the other constituencies. The legislated quota with stood a high court challenge, resulting in the very high level of women in the 2006 elections.

SOUTHERN AFRICAN CONTEXT



At 58%, Lesotho has the highest number of women in local government in the SADC region, followed by Namibia and then South Africa. Mauritius and Zambia are at the bottom of the list with 6.4% and 4.6% respectively. A lot of gains have been made at national level with South Africa moving to the top of the chart during its April 2009 national elections. Angola and Mozambique are also close to reaching 40%. However Botswana and Namibia regressed in their last elections. Botswana dropped from 11% to 7.9% whilst Namibia moved from 30.8% to 22.2%. Even then the outcome of the Namibia election is still being contested.

It is yet to be seen if countries holding their national and local government elections later this year will edge closer to the 50% target by 2015.

Key challenges

- A large proportion of the Basotho nation (both women and men alike) still does not understand why the 30% quota provision for women in local government was legislated. This may impact negatively on the outcome of elections especially in electoral divisions that have been earmarked for this.
- Another key factor that poses a challenge is lack of understanding of the role of traditional leadership in the phase of local government. In the past 2005 local government elections, many people particularly those living in rural communities were of the opinion that traditional leadership is being wiped out by party politics and elites through local government structures. In the same manner, lack of enthusiasm may bear unexpected consequences on the outcome of elections.
- Media coverage of the entire electoral process leading up to polling day (April 2010) tends to be limited.
- A key concern is whether or not the high level of women will be sustained, as local government faces many challenges including very little compensation and resources with which to operate.

Action points

- It is important that the government, civil society organisations and development partners, join efforts in coming up with structured sensitisation and awareness raising programmes aimed at educating the public on the 30% quota. Ideally this should be increased to 50%.
- At both the national and party level, there is need to adopt deliberate measures i.e. quotas that will help reinforce the 50% target of women in all decision-making structures by 2015.

Questions for discussion

- Why does Lesotho only have a target for women in politics at the local and not the national level?
- What needs to be done to ensure that there is no backsliding in the elections?
- What is the role of the media in publicising the SADC Protocol, strengthening the 50/50 Campaign and ensuring public access to information around elections?

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