Mauritius Women in Politics Fact Sheet

Mauritius in perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>% of women in cabinet</th>
<th>% of women in parliament</th>
<th>% of women councilors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National assembly</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mauritius</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
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- The table above illustrates that the representation of women in cabinet, parliament and as councilors in Mauritius is well below the regional level in every instance. There is no area in which Mauritius comes close to the one-third level.
- The graph below illustrates that, with 5.6 percent women in parliament, Mauritius is the lowest in the SADC ranking of women in Parliament.
How have other SADC countries made the mark

- Three SADC countries - South Africa, Mozambique and Seychelles - have achieved the thirty percent women in parliament. Mozambique, with 34 percent women in parliament in elections held in late 2004 leads the way.
- Two SADC countries - Tanzania and Namibia - have come close to doing so.
- Of these, only Seychelles has achieved this target without using quotas. Seychelles is one of the few countries in the world that has a long history and tradition of women's participation in decision-making.
- South Africa, Mozambique and Namibia all have Proportional Representation or PR systems. This means that there are no constituencies. Parties win seats according to the proportion of votes they get in the elections. In all three countries, the ruling parties (ANC, FRELIMO and SWAPO) have voluntary quotas of thirty percent for the representation of women in politics. Voluntary party quotas in a PR system are powerful tools for change because parties decide which candidates will get seats. They can therefore ensure that women are elected.
- Tanzania is the only SADC country with a constituency system that has adopted a quota, in this case a constitutional quota. How this works is that women and men are free to contest the elections, based on constituencies. In addition, 20 percent of the seats in parliament are reserved for women. These seats are divided between parties that contest the election on a proportional basis. Parties thus choose their women candidates for these seats and submit them to parliament. The advantage is that women are appointed to the seats by their party, not by the president. The disadvantage is that the “women’s seats” are sometimes seen as inferior to the constituency seats. Tanzania has 23 percent women in parliament: 20 percent through the special seats and three percent who contested the seats through the normal constituency elections.

Key issues in Mauritius

2005 is the last opportunity for ensuring the thirty percent representation by women in all areas of decision-making as stipulated in the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development. On current trends, and unless drastic measures are taken, Mauritius is not likely to honour its commitment.

Constitutional provisions

Unlike Tanzania, which has a constitutional quota for women in parliament, the only provision in the Mauritian Constitution is for ensuring equal representation of all ethnic groups. Section 5 of the First Schedule of the Constitution ensures adequate representation of the officially recognized ethnic groups but there is an absence on the representation of women. "Section 5 (1) – "In order to ensure a fair and adequate representation of each community, there shall be 8 seats in the Assembly, additional to the 62 seats for members representing constituencies, which shall so far as is possible be allocated to persons belonging to parties who have stood as candidates for election as members at the general election but have not been returned as members to represent constituencies...Appropriate community” in the above section means the community, which is most under-represented.”
Although women are most under-represented, “community” in this context means “ethnic group”.

**Electoral system**

Furthermore, Mauritius has a First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system that elsewhere has not proved favourable to women’s increased participation in politics. A commission chaired Justice Albie Sachs, a Constitutional court judge from South Africa, assisted by Messrs B.B. Tandon, Election Commissioner of India and Robert Ahnee, former Judge of the Supreme Court of Mauritius reviewed the electoral system in 2001/2002 with a view to ensuring a better representation of opposition parties in parliament. The Commission proposed that a Proportional Representation (PR) system be added to the First Past the Post and Best Loser system to ensure better representation of the opposition. This would have been more amenable to increasing women’s representation.

Following the report a select committee comprising members of Government and of the Opposition took a further look into the recommendations with a view to introduce proportional representation at the National Assembly.

The Select Committee made recommendations similar to the Commission. It proposed that 30 PR seats be added to the 62 FPTP seats and the 8 Best Loser Seats making a total of 100 seats in Parliament. It also mentioned that the PR should include women to ensure that they are adequately represented.

But proposed reforms by both Albie Sachs and the Select Committee have been postponed.

**Voluntary party quotas?**

All is now up to political parties. None has yet instituted a voluntary party quota for increasing women’s representation in politics.