

## **MAURITIUS POLICY BRIEF**

### **August 2018**

#### **50/50 by 2030: Women in politics in Mauritius 2018**



One of the key targets in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development is 50% women in all areas of decision-making by 2030. Progress towards equal representation of women in political decision making over the past ten years has been slow and uneven. Mauritius is the only country that has not signed the SADC Protocol on the basis that child marriage. The civil code allows for a child to marry at the age of 16 years with the parents' consent. This practice is also cultural and the Mauritius government stand firm that the law will not be amended to abide by the provisions of the SADC Gender Protocol and Sustainable Development Goals that both refute such practices.

The next local and national elections are planned for 2018 and 2019 respectively. Gender Links Mauritius' (GLM) 50/50 strategic focus ahead of the imminent elections is to:

- Lobby for Mauritius to sign, ratify and adopt effective implementation mechanisms for the SADC Gender Protocol.

#### **QUICK FACTS**

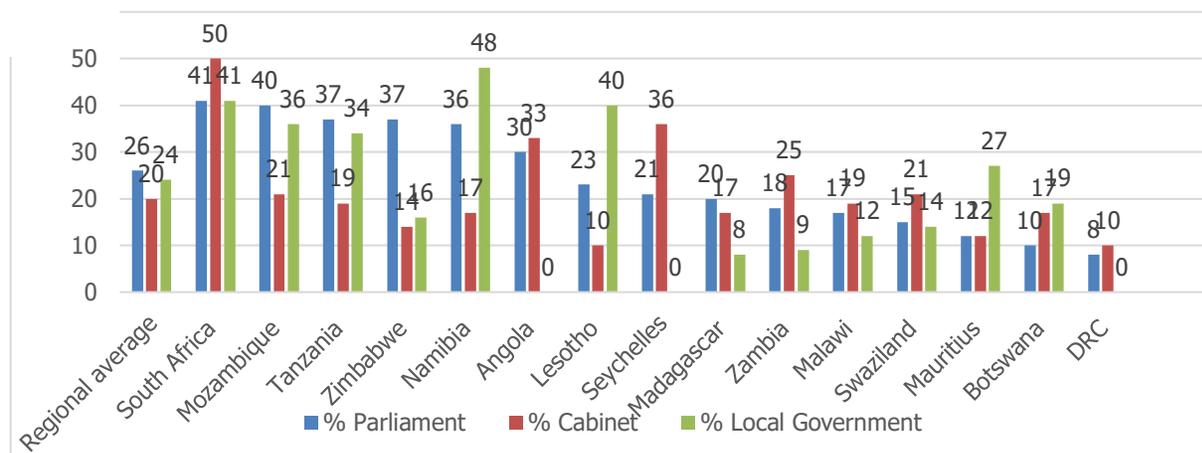
- A woman president from 2015 to 2017
- A woman speaker of Parliament.
- 11.4% Women in Parliament.
- 13% Women in Cabinet.
- 27% Women in Local Government.
- There was an amendment to the Constitution to allow for a gender neutral approach in the New Local Government Act of 2012.
- Political parties must have gender neutral quotas of 50% in their constitutions/manifestos
- 18% women sources.
- The office of the Speaker has set up a Parliamentary Gender -

- Lobby for gender quotas to be increased from 30% to 50% at the local level and 50% quota at the national level. A strengthened SADC Protocol Alliance in Mauritius needs to increase strategic lobbying, communications and necessary training.
- Lobby and provide technical support for political parties to have 50% gender neutral quotas in their constitutions/manifestos.
- Conduct gender and elections capacity building for women in politics to ensure effective participation and gender responsive governance.
- Provide technical support for Gender Focal Points of all Ministries must be revived and be given clear roles and responsibilities.
- Create a national awareness campaign on the Parliamentary Gender Caucus once it is set up so that the public at large know how to get their voices heard.

This policy brief places the SADC region in the global context, focuses on the progress made by Mauritius in SADC, highlighting some of the gains and losses over the last decade. It examines some of the reasons for this, highlighting the roles that electoral systems, quotas, political will, campaigns and the media can play in achieving the target. A key point made is that if some countries are able to achieve or come close to achieving this target then *all* countries in the region are capable of doing so.

### Regional context

Most SADC countries are far from reaching the projected 50% representation of women in decision-making target by 2030. Generally there are much lower proportions of women in cabinet than in parliament and local government. As heads of state appoint cabinets and can therefore make rapid changes in this area, the relatively low level of women in cabinet reflects weak political will at leadership level.



Source: Gender Links 2018, SADC Gender Protocol Country reports and IPU last accessed 18 June 2018. Women in Parliament, Cabinet and Local Government 2018 chart shows that:

- Performance continues to be mixed in different areas of political decision-making.
- Only South Africa achieved over 40% in parliament, cabinet and local government.
- Only eight countries have exceeded the 30% mark in one or more areas including South Africa (parliament, cabinet and local government); Mozambique (parliament, cabinet and local government); Tanzania (parliament, cabinet and local government); Angola (parliament); Namibia (parliament, local government); Zimbabwe (parliament), Lesotho (local government) and Seychelles (cabinet).
- Madagascar, eSwatini, Mauritius, Malawi, Zambia, DRC and Botswana still have a long way to go to achieve gender parity across all categories.
- Namibia, Mozambique and Tanzania have over 30% women in parliament and local government.
- All perform better on women in parliament than cabinet and local government except for South Africa where women comprise 50% of cabinet compared to parliament (42%) and local government (41%).
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### **National context**

The Republic of Mauritius ratified the Optional Protocol of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2008. The Convention provides for “the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life -- including the right to vote and to stand for election -- as well as education, health and employment. State parties agree to take all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

Yet, the Republic of Mauritius is doing very badly on women in politics. Women are under-represented in this highest sphere of decision-making. The Republic of Mauritius held four general elections between 2000 to 2014. The percentage of women in the National Assembly increased from 3% in 1991 to 18.8% in the 2010 general elections. According to the final Millennium Development Goals Mauritius Report in 2015, women in parliaments decreased to 11.4% (8 out of 70 parliamentarians). There are only two female ministers of a total of 23 Ministers. One female minister is looking after two ministries after the Gender Minister stepped down. There has never been a woman leader of any political party in Mauritius. There are only 27% women councillors.

With an SGDI score of 35% for governance, Mauritius moves from 13<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> place in local government but lags behinds in women in parliament. Citizens scored the country at 60% according to the Citizen's Score Card. In addition to lobby for legislative and policy level reforms, it is also imperative to train women potential candidates across all political parties to stand as candidates in the next general elections. The office of the Speaker is in the process of setting up a Parliamentary Gender Caucus.

Achieving gender equality requires women's active participation and involvement in decision-making at all levels, starting at home and extending to the highest levels of government. Several studies have gone beyond numbers to show that women bring different approaches and

perspectives to decision-making. Women's equal access and participation in political decision-making is a pre-requisite for gender responsive governance. Gender equality is central to representation, participation, accountability, responsiveness and transparency. Elections are one opportunity to increase women's representation, raise issues of gender inequality and women's human rights, and to press for greater government accountability on gender sensitivity.

## Electoral systems and quotas

The question is, why are some countries making good progress while others are regressing? The answer to this is multifaceted and relates mainly to electoral systems, approaches to quotas, political will and concerted 50/50 campaigns.

Despite the provisions in the Post 2015 SADC Gender Protocol for "special measures" at all governance levels, progress made by SADC countries varies widely. By way of background there are two main types of electoral systems:



- In the **Proportional Representation (PR)**, or "list system," citizens vote for parties that are allocated seats in parliament according to the percentage of vote they receive. Individual candidates get in according to where they sit on the list. In an open list system, voters determine where candidates sit on the list. In a closed list system, the party determines where candidates sit on the list, although this is usually based on democratic nomination processes within the party.
- In the constituency, or "**First Past the Post**" (FPTP) system, citizens vote not just for the party, but also for the candidate who represents the party in a geographically defined constituency. Thus, a party can garner a significant percentage of the votes, but still have no representative in parliament, because in this system "the winner takes all."

Mauritius uses the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system both at local and national level. In the constituency, or "**First Past the Post**" (FPTP) system, citizens vote not just for the party, but also for the candidate who represents the party in a geographically defined constituency. Thus, a party can garner a significant percentage of the votes, but still have no representative in parliament, because in this system "the winner takes all." Very often women are the losers as candidates are chosen on the basis of their ethnicity in Mauritius and men get the advantage over women.

While the percentage of women is at only 11.4% in the Mauritian National Assembly, in Rodrigues women are at 23.8% in the Regional Assembly; the Deputy Chief Commissioner is a woman and Heads quite a few Commissions.

There is overwhelming evidence internationally to suggest that women stand a better chance of being elected under the PR (and especially the closed list PR system) as opposed to the constituency electoral system.<sup>1</sup> In a PR system voters choose based on the party and its

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the comparative global data on quotas for women in politics see [www.idea.int/quota](http://www.idea.int/quota).

policies, rather than on a particular individual. This works in favour of women – at least as far as getting their foot in the door – because of socialised prejudices against women in politics. The chance of women being elected is even higher when the PR system works in concert with a quota.

### **Mauritius: Lessons from local government in the countdown to 2019**

Mauritius is the only SADC country that has not signed the SADC Gender Protocol. One of the island’s objections to the Protocol is Article 5 – affirmative action, now referred to as “special measures” in the Post 2015 Protocol in an effort to be more inclusive. Ironically, in 2015, Mauritius adopted a gender neutral quota for local government that led to the level of women’s representation increasing four fold, to 27%. Although all elections in Mauritius are held primarily on a FPTP basis, public education and awareness helped to ensure that women candidates fielded in the elections won.

Pressure is mounting for a radical change from the FPTP electoral System to a PR system and at the least, for the quota system adopted at local level to be implemented at national level. A political dialogue organised by Gender Links Mauritius (GLM) and the Mauritius Council for Social Service as part of 50 years of independence celebrations at MACOSS in Ebène, heard that Mauritius seems no closer to breaking new ground at the national level as the 2019 elections draw closer. Analysis done by GLM shows that no political party has/nor implements voluntary quotas for women. The chances of a substantial increase in women’s representation in the 2019 elections remain bleak.

### **Electoral system in Mauritius at national level**

Electoral system	Constitutional quota
First Past the Post	No quota system at national level however lobbying for the same neutral approach as per the Local Government Act.

Electoral system	Constitutional quota (explain)
First Past the Post	A neutral approach where one of three candidate should be of either sex

### **Political parties**

#### **Audit of political parties and quotas in Mauritius 2017**

<b>Political parties</b>	<b>Quota and Nature/None</b>	<b>Name of Leader</b>	<b>Number of national executive members (as per list of Hon Members on Government Website)</b>	<b>No Women</b>	<b>% of Women</b>
MSM	No Quota	Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	32	4	12,5

Political parties	Quota and Nature/None	Name of Leader	Number of national executive members (as per list of Hon on Government Website)	No Women	% of Women
PMSD	No Quota	Xavier Luc Duval	11	3	27,3
PTR	No Quota	Navin Ramgoolam	4	0	0
ML	No Quota	Ivan Collendavelloo	7	0	0
MP	No Quota	Alan Gannoo	4	0	0
MMM	No Quota	Paul Berenger	11	0	0
Independent		Danielle Selvon	1	1	100
Reform Party		Roshi Badhain	1	0	0

The table above shows a very low representation of women at executive levels in parties represented in Parliament. Parties do not have a quota system and thus this adds to the very low representation of women.

At a regional average of 13%, few political parties have "special" or "affirmative" measures to promote women's representation and participation in their own ranks. Madagascar has the highest proportion of women in political party leadership at 27%. Mauritius has no women in political party leadership except the women wings which is not totally mainstreamed in the spirit of the party.

### **Election management**

Election Management Bodies (EMBs) ensure that the environment in which elections take place is conducive to the conduct credible elections.<sup>2</sup> EMBs are responsible for the management and conduct of elections and play a crucial role in ensuring that fair elections are held and in the end accepted.<sup>3</sup> EMBs need to begin, "in their own institutions, by ensuring that women are given positions of responsibility and that the policies and practices of the institution work to improve the status of women in society. This might involve creating incentives for women to become election administrators; training all members of staff to be sensitive to gender issues; and collecting gender-disaggregated statistics in order to evaluate women's participation; and, identifying aspects of the democratic process that can be improved."<sup>4</sup> In Mauritius the EMB is headed by a man.

### **The role of the media**

<sup>2</sup> SADC Gender and Development Monitor 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat (2016) Election Management: A Compendium, of Commonwealth Good Practice.

<sup>4</sup> Commonwealth Compendium of Good Election Management Practice.

Freedom of expression has always been guaranteed under Section 12 of the Constitution of Mauritius. Within the same section, limitations are possible in the “interests of defense, public safety, public order, public morality or public health.” Although Mauritius has not signed the SADC Gender Protocol, the constitution guarantees gender equality across all sectors.

While the press has significantly opened up to private players, television has lagged behind in most countries. State broadcasters dominate in Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles and Zimbabwe. South Africa, Mozambique and Zambia have both private and community television stations. The big challenge as we work towards 2030 is how to make these changes come about.

Over the last five years, GL has worked with over 100 newsrooms that elected to become Centres of Excellence (COE) for Gender in the Media. With 22% women sources compared to 19% for non-COE's, the COE's performed slightly better than their counter parts. More encouraging, however, is the qualitative evidence. The lesson, however, is that these gains are slow, and they are fragile. Changes in the political environment and in leadership, as witnessed in Mauritius where we report an unfortunate regression, can jeopardise gains made. We are reminded that social change is seldom linear. It is fraught with ups and downs. There are no overnight miracles. Consistent pressure and advocacy remain crucial. Performance varies between different countries in the region: With 28% women sources, Seychelles and Botswana tied for top position. For Seychelles, this represented a decrease compared to 2010, while for Botswana this represented a significant increase. Zimbabwe (24%) also performed well compared to the baseline study. Zambia, Mauritius and the DRC regressed, with the DRC (6%) registering the lowest proportion of women sources (6%) showing that for those who go the distance, real change is possible.

### **Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWIE)**

Most political party leadership is male dominated and transformation within for ethical and moral behavior towards female counterpart politicians is still a challenge. In the face of lobbying for laws and policies for more women in political leadership, there is also need to lobby for respect towards female political counterparts. The verbal abuse of female candidates, resulting in emotional abuse is common especially in parliament. Male chauvinism is rife in the lead up to elections. The media has played a key role in exposing, reporting and condemning the politicians who are violent. Political parties are encouraged to support their women candidates, and ensure they are an integral part of the party and treated with respect.

### **50/50 by 2030 Strategy and way forward**

Political parties are often referred to as the gatekeepers of democracy and have multiple functions within the electoral process. They are first and foremost organizations that serve as the representatives of their membership, citizens of their countries. They also mirror the democratic soundness of their nations.



Internally, political parties facilitate political recruitment and play a crucial role in candidate selection in the nomination process. Through their party structures, they provide support, financial and professional, to potential candidates that inevitably form

legislative bodies as elected members of parliament and in some cases, the executive branch of government<sup>5</sup>. Political parties and their support for women within their party structures and candidates are crucial to enhancing and sustaining women's representation in the electoral process and in decision-making process as a whole.

When parties fail to ensure that women assume leadership posts, this raises questions about their commitment to advancing gender equality more broadly. At a practical level, having women in decision-making within parties plays an important role in pushing for, and implementing special measures like quotas for women.

What still needs to be done is to:

- Increase the gender-neutral quota, to be applied across the board, from 30% to 50%. Have a strong Alliance group who will do the communications and training
- Political parties must have gender-neutral quotas of 50% in their constitutions/manifestos.
- Training and Lobbying with political parties across boards.
- Accompanying any temporary special measures to increase women's participation with advocacy and capacity building for women in politics to ensure effective participation and gender responsive governance.
- The Gender Focal Points of all Ministries must be revived and be given clear roles and responsibilities
- A National Awareness campaign on the Parliamentary Gender Caucus once it is set up so that the public knows how to get their voices heard.

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<sup>5</sup> OSCE report