

gender, elections and media

FACT SHEET



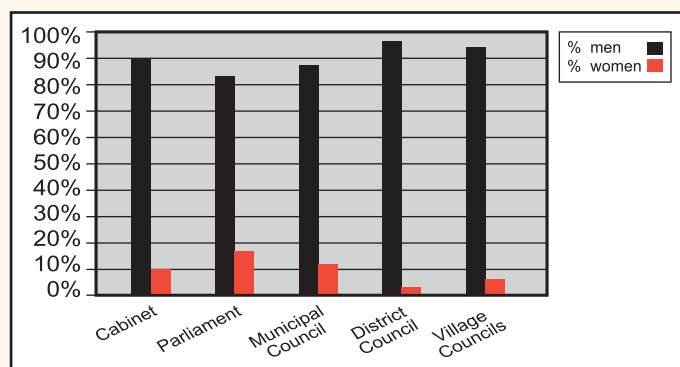
WOMEN IN POLITICS

Key targets

In August 2008, regional leaders signed the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development. The Protocol sets 28 targets for the achievement of gender equality in SADC by 2015, including equal representation of women in all areas of decision-making. Mauritius is among the two countries (along with Botswana) that has not signed the Protocol as it maintains that provisions for affirmative action are against the Constitution.

Women in Mauritian politics

The graph and the table show the glaring gender gaps in all areas of political decision-making in Mauritius.



Level of Govt	Members/Cllrs	No of women	% women
Cabinet	20	2	10%
National Assembly	70	12	17.1%
Municipal Council	126	16	12.7%
District Council	124	4	3.2%
Village Councils	1476	86	5.8%

The executive

The Executive authority of Mauritius is vested in the President. According to Chapter VI Article 58 of the Constitution, "There shall be a Prime Minister and a Deputy Prime Minister who shall be appointed by the President." There shall also be an Attorney-General and such other offices of Minister established by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister and shall be not more than 24.

Just prior to the 2010 elections there were two out of twenty (10%) women ministers in the cabinet.

Parliament

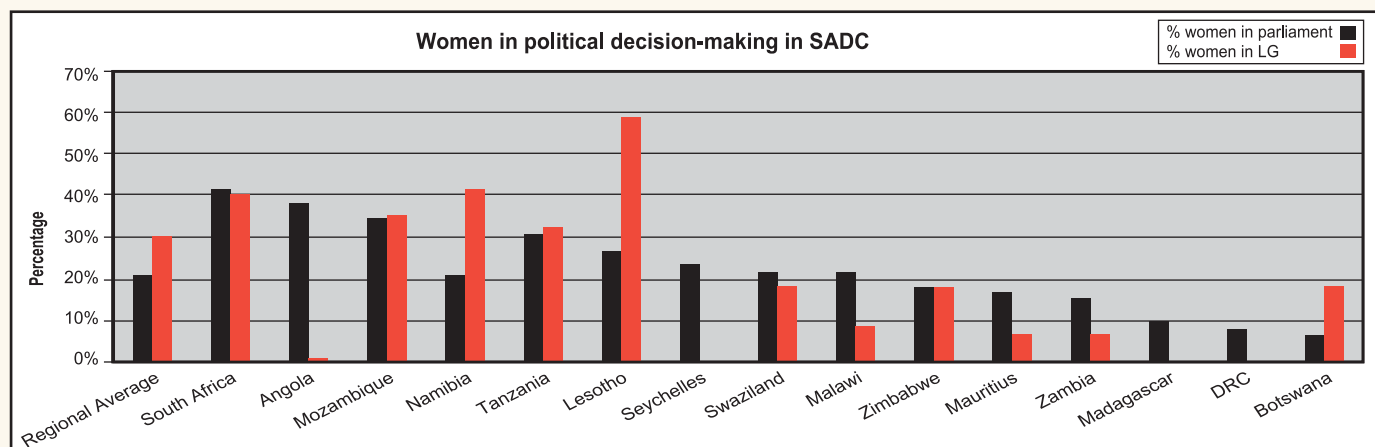
	No of women MPs	Size of Parliament	%
1967	0	70	0.00
1976	3	70	4.29
1982	2	66	3.03
1983	4	70	5.71
1987	5	70	7.14
1991	2	66	3.03
1995	6	66	9.09
2000	4	70	5.71
1967-2000	26	548	4.74

Before 2005, women constituted 5.6% of members of parliament. The table shows that up to 2005 the highest proportion of women that had ever existed in the Mauritian parliament was 9%. This increased to 17% in the 2005 elections.

Local government

During the 2005 elections, the proportion of women in municipalities and district councils remained static at 11.9% and 3.2% respectively. In the 2005 elections, the percentage of women in village councils increased from 2.9% to 5.9%.

Mauritius in the SADC context



The graph shows that Mauritius ranks about tenth in the region with regard to women's political representation. At 43%, South Africa has the highest proportion of women in decision-making.

Electoral system

Mauritius has a First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system that has not proved favourable to women's increased participation in politics. A commission chaired by 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 introducing 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.

Lobbying for a legislated quota

Mauritius has not subscribed to the 50/50 campaign, despite much lobbying on the part of Gender Links and Media Watch Organisation-GEMSA. Women in Networking, a network of UNDP, Media Watch Organisation, Soroptimist and Women's Association of Entrepreneur did a bill board campaign and petition in February and March asking for political parties to field at least one woman in each constituency. The 12,000 signatures were submitted to leaders of political parties. The outcomes will be apparent after all parties announce their candidates. But there is unlikely to be a substantial increase in women.

Where do parties stand on gender?

The Constitution of the Labour Party stipulates that there must be at least 30% women in party structures at all levels. But no mention is made about Parliament. Another section of the Labour Programme states that:

- There should be a better representation of women at all levels of democratic institutions;
- There should be the creation of a favourable atmosphere in which women can participate in municipal elections;
- The participation of women in political and economic life should be encouraged.



In a workshop organised by GL/MWO-GEMSA in February 2005, the then leader of the opposition and now Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam voiced his support for both the electoral reform and the introduction of quotas to ensure an increased level of women's participation in politics. The following are excerpts from the presentations of Dr Navin Ramgoolam (now Prime Minister) stated:

"To address the issue, we need to look into the causes of the gender gap in politics. Political scientists site four factors:

- Socio economic factors: e.g. unequal access to education; the difficulties of combining political career with parental responsibility.
- Cultural factors: Conservative attitudes against an egalitarian culture between men and women.
- Political factors: The political parties tend to be male dominated.
- Electoral systems.

While socio economic and cultural factors are impediments, the answer to the problem lies in the political factors and electoral systems. They have been found to be the determining factors. It has been found that there is a close correlation between electoral systems and women's representation. It is a fact that some systems exaggerate the low representation of women in politics.

The main types of electoral systems do produce different outcomes. Studies show, for example, that the first past the post electoral system produces less women MPs than the PR system even in democratically advanced countries. This is irrespective of other factors, e.g. socio cultural factors.

Countries with PR systems such as Sweden, the Netherlands and South Africa have a much higher percentage of women MPs: 43% Sweden, 36% in the Netherlands, 30% in South Africa."

The 2010 elections

The Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM-UN-MMSD) also called "Heart Alliance", the main opposition alliance for the May 6 2010 general elections, has only put up 8 out of 60 candidates that is 13%. This is a big blow not only for gender activists but also for gender democracy. Section 15 (v) of the Constitution of the MMM dated October 1998 reads "En établissant les listes de candidats aux élections générales et municipales, le Parti s'efforcera de présenter au moins 20% de femmes." Translated, this means, "in preparing the list for the general and municipal elections the Party will ensure that there are at least 20% women."

The likelihood is that Mauritius might actually lose ground at the national level where women's political representation is concerned this election. Should that happen, Mauritius would follow two Southern African countries that had elections in 2009- Botswana and Namibia- in moving backwards rather than forwards since the adoption of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development in August 2008. This also leaves the local elections later in the year as the main hope for any kind of improvement.

Key questions for the 2010 elections

1. Why has there been so little progress in women's political representation since the 2005 elections? What is the outlook for 2010 at national and local level?
2. Should Mauritius adopt a legislated quota for 2015 general and local government elections?
3. How committed will the next government and leadership be to women's rights and gender equality?
4. What qualities do Mauritians want in their future leaders, generally and in relation to gender?
5. What pressure should be made so that Mauritius signs the Protocol on Gender and Development



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