



**Should SADC member states have legislative quotas aimed at increasing women representation in politics?**

**Round table discussion report**

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Phillipus Wido, one of the Namibian parliamentarians who took part in the round table discussion  
*Photo: Jabulani Sithole*

***Prepared by Daud Kayisi,  
Gender and Media Diversity Centre Officer***

## Quick facts for Namibia women in politics

### *Proportion (%) of women in politics in Namibia: 2012*

Parliament	25
Local Government	42
Cabinet	20

- There are no quotas for women in politics at national level.
- The ruling South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) has a 50/50 quota for women at local level but not national level.
- During the last held local government elections in 2009, proportion of women in local government dropped from 30.9% to 23%.
- Namibia signed and ratified the 2008 SADC Gender Protocol on Gender and Development – a binding instrument that calls on member states to put in place measures to increase women representation in decision making positions in all SADC countries by 2015.
- Next presidential and parliamentary elections will be held in 2014

## Executive summary

Ahead of the 2012 SADC Gender Protocol Barometer launch in South Africa, the Gender and Media Diversity Centre and Alliance & Partnerships programmes of Gender Links in collaboration with five Namibian members of parliament (MPs) held a round table discussion on gender and governance in Southern Africa. A motion on whether SADC member states should have legislative quotas aimed at increasing women representation in political leadership in the region guided the discussion. This report details the proceedings of the discussions.

It emerged during the discussion that the region is failing to achieve the 50 percent women representation in leadership and decision making because of a number of factors. The participants identified patriarchy, lack of understanding of the gender equality concept and lack of political will to move from protocol to action. The participants argued that unless these challenges are addressed or the 50/50 campaign will remain a dream that "will take long to materialise."

## Background

In 2008, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Heads of States signed the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, an instrument that sets 23 progressive targets aimed at empowering women politically, economically and socially. From a political/leadership front, the Protocol stipulates that "States Parties shall endeavour that, by 2015, at least fifty percent of decision making positions in the public and private sectors are held by women..."

However, with only three years to the Protocol timeline - 2015, the SADC Gender Protocol 2012 Barometer notes that "women's political representation [in SADC] continues to progress fast than the global rate but not fast enough to reach the 2015 target." The Barometer further notes that "[only] four SADC countries have close to or over 40% women in parliament but six have 20% or less."

With a progressive instrument (The 2008 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development) in place, one wonders as to why the region is not moving fast enough to meet the 50 percent women representation in politics. It is in view of this that GL organised this round table debate to discuss issues halting the 50/50 campaign in the region. Participants argued that an electoral system of electing political leaders at parliamentary and local government levels has a bearing on representation of women in such political bodies. Namibia has a Proportion Representation or "list system" at national level and legislated 30% quota at local government. According to the SADC Gender Protocol 2012 Barometer, "quotas are not a panacea but they are the best short-term method for ensuring that progress is made. When accompanied by supportive strategies, quotas have delivered rapid and tangible benefits [in propelling women onto political leadership positions]"

**Moderator:** Loveness Jambaya Nyakujara – Gender Links

### **Analysis**

The law makers and gender experts present at the discussion identified three major challenges that they believed are halting the 50/50 campaign in the region. These are patriarchy, lack of understanding of the gender equality concept and lack of political will to move from Protocol to action.

Of the three, participants singled out patriarchy as a leading factor. The participants argued that most SADC societies still conform to patriarchy and this has a bearing in a proportion of women in political leadership in the the region. They said that many able women are denied leadership positions because of their sex. As a solution to this, the contributors suggested a need for an aggressive sensitisation campaigns to civic educate the masses about gender and leadership. Further, the experts said having gender champions at various levels of a society would help make a difference.

On lack of understanding of the gender equality concept, the parliamentarians (MPs) advised that gender activists should drill women wanting to venture into politics regarding the issue. The MPs argued that sometimes voters do lose confidence in women because of the way they would wish to execute gender once elected.

Last but not least, participants suggested that the region should come up with an enforcement instrument for the implementation of the 50/50 agenda. The MPs argued that there is laxity in the implementation of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development by many member states because it is not yet legally binding. They said coming up with a legally binding enforcement tool would ensure that women equally occupy leadership positions.

## DISCUSSION

### a. Patriarchy

The gender experts and law makers first identified patriarchy as a major cause leading to a few women occupying political leadership positions in the region. The lawmakers argued that although the region has a progressive instrument – the 2008 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development - many people are not aware of it and do not believe in female leadership. “Some people still think men are naturally born leaders as opposed to women,” said Muremi, Nimrod Mbandu (MP). He argued that many women wanting to venture into politics are either discouraged or denied by patriarchy.

This, participants said, calls for an aggressive campaign to break patriarchy values and beliefs that are thwarting the 50/50 campaign in the region. Merciline Machisa from Gender Links said war against patriarchy would be won if people who are aware of gender equality benefits start championing it. She challenged the parliamentarians present at the discussion to become gender champions in their localities. She further argued that gender champions at a local level are more effective in changing people’s attitudes towards women, a thing that would contribute positively to the 50/50 campaign.

Katamello Phillipus Wido (MP) concurred with Machisa: “People out there need someone they can look up to before they fully support the gender equality agenda. For instance, most men out there do not want to be associated with supporting women aspiring to become leaders because their society will view them as not being men enough”. The legislator then said having women and men championing gender would indeed make a difference.

### b. Lack of understanding of the gender equality concept

One of the male parliamentarians at the discussion faulted some women politicians for not understanding the gender equality concept. He argued that some women think that gender equality in leadership means completely taking out men from the scene. He cited an example of a woman who aspired to become a SWAPO Coordinator (in Namibia) but had “very bad campaign tactics”. To his dismay, the politician said, the aspiring coordinator told



Nambili Ndapewoshali Nangula: Female politicians must up their game  
*Photo Jabulani Sithole*

a woman gathering in one of her campaign meetings that once she is voted into power, “she will fire all men and replace them with women.” The law maker said the aspirant failed because she had forgotten that her campaign was directed at a group of women whose husbands she would fire after rising to power. She eventually lost the elections.

He said while not all women aspiring to become politicians would be like this, most women lose confidence in the eyes of potential voters because they do not fully understand the gender equality concept and other political tactics.

Concurring with his views, Nambili, Ndapewoshali Nangula (MP) said male politicians capitalise on such mistakes and discourage the voters to avoid “wheel chairing” women into leadership positions. The legislature argued that women must up their game and demonstrate their potential. She further said that while the society categorised women unworthy for leadership, their deeds and ability that could demonstrated through their speech can help change people’s attitudes.

Ndapewoshali Nangula argued that people out there would not just vote for a woman for the sake of increasing their numbers, but they need capable leaders. She advised women aspiring to become politicians someday to invest in education and have sound economic knowledge. The parliamentarian said sound economic knowledge and good education are among the qualities that people look for in a leader. The legislator then advised that SADC member states should ensure that women and men, boys and girls are given equal opportunities either in education or economic activities. She said that this is one way of growing potential future of leaders that would be judged based on their qualifications and potential and not sex.

**c. Lack of political will to move from protocol to action**

Last but not least, participants said while the Protocol is viewed as the most progressive instrument aimed at empowering women in the region, there is a need for an enforcement mechanism to ensure that the protocol is implemented. The parliamentarians argued that although SADC heads of states signed the protocol, many countries are still far from achieving the desired



Kandjii, Ambrosius: Political parties in the region should begin alternating their leadership terms of office based in sex *Photo: Jabulani Sithole*

50 percent women representation in political leadership. The law makers said this calls for an affirmative action to hold the member states accountable to their commitment.

Kandjii, Ambrosius (MP) suggested that in order to live 50/50 dream, political parties in the region should begin alternating their respective top party leadership based on sex. “What if political parties categorically state that if a male president has served a party for a five year term of office, the next five years should be served by a female president? I feel this would

ensure that at some point or the other, a country would be governed by a female leader,” Ambrosius said.

In order to achieve the 50 percent women representation in political structures such as the cabinet, parliament and local authorities, the legislators suggested that state parties to the protocol should come up with legislative quotas to ensure that every cabinet or parliament has equal numbers of women and men. A female law maker argued that this could probably be the best way of ensuring equal representation as opposed to “leaving everything to chance.”

### **Conclusion**

To cap it all, gender experts and law makers agreed that the above mentioned factors are halting the 50/50 campaign in the region. The participants urged gender experts, politicians, policy makers and any other concerned parties to step in with new innovative ways that should challenge patriarchy and equip women politicians with political skills. The participants further stated that there is need for more deliberate policies to increase women representation in politics.

**Annexe 1: List of participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Email</b>
Muremi, Nimrod Mbandu	M	SWAPO	+264 61 202 8000	
Katamelo, Phillipus Wido	M	SWAPO	+264 61 202 8000	
Kandjii, Ambrosius	M	SWAPO	+264 61 202 8000	
Mensah-Williams, Margaret Natalie	F	SWAPO	+264 61 202 8000	
Nambili, Ndapewoshali Nangula	F	SWAPO	+264 61 202 8000	
Loveness Jambaya	F	Gender Links	011 622 2877	<a href="mailto:alliance@genderlinks.org.za">alliance@genderlinks.org.za</a>
Tarisai Nyamweda	F	Gender Links	011 622 2877	<a href="mailto:mediaofficer@genderlinks.org.za">mediaofficer@genderlinks.org.za</a>
Merciline Machisa	F	Gender Links	011 622 2877	<a href="mailto:gbvindicators@genderlinks.org.za">gbvindicators@genderlinks.org.za</a>
Lucia Makamure	F	Gender Links	011 622 2877	<a href="mailto:allianceofficer@genderlinks.org.za">allianceofficer@genderlinks.org.za</a>
Shamiso Chigorimbo	F	Gender Links	011 622 2877	<a href="mailto:procurement@genderlinks.org.za">procurement@genderlinks.org.za</a>
Daud Kayisi	M	Gender Links	011 622 2877	<a href="mailto:gmdcofficer@genderlinks.org.za">gmdcofficer@genderlinks.org.za</a>
Jabulani Sithole	M	Gender Links	011 622 2877	<a href="mailto:knowledgemanager@genderlinks.org.za">knowledgemanager@genderlinks.org.za</a>