

**Participation but no Voice : A Preliminary  
Report on Proportional Representation in  
Zimbabwe**

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## **Introduction**

This is the first in a series of papers on Proportional Representation (PR) and the quota system in Zimbabwe, and a follow up on an initial paper published by RAU (Matyszak. 2013) on the confusion about Proportional Representation. Whilst RAU recognises that citizen participation is generally the key to holding duty bearers accountable, it also acknowledges the integral role of women and youth, despite the fact that their voices continue to be marginalised.

The reasons vary but the attitudes about women and youth have to change given that these two groups constitute the largest sections in our population: women are 52% of the total populations according to the 2012 census, whilst youth, those under 35 years, are 67.8%, an enormous “youth bulge”. Full participation of citizens is at the cornerstone of democracy and this can never be achieved if one dominant section of the population continues to speak on behalf of others. This paper adds voice to this conversation and explores why efforts to increase women participation in public spaces in Zimbabwe continue to suffer a still-birth where the argument is twisted to blame the same women for not taking the ‘opportunities’ availed. Whilst there might be problems of slow uptake, it is the principle of *nothing for us without us* that must motivate political systems to ensure that women fully participate in all structures of society, and this should also be reflected in the political parties.

The demand for a constitutional quota came after realization that attempts at voluntary party quotas yielded little towards increasing the number of women participating in the structures. Left alone, political parties have demonstrated that they are not willing to adopt the democratic principle of increasing women representation. This is evidenced by the continuous decline in the number of female candidates in elections and those elected under first-past-the-post system in Zimbabwe. This explains why affirmative action was needed to force through a constitutional provision. Reserving a quota for women is regarded as a fast track measure to increase women’s representation, designed to address the slow pace of change in the participation and representation of women and minority groups in areas of society where they are historically under-represented. This has become popular in Africa because it offers the quickest and best chances for women to increase representation in the legislature.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This report is premised on the rights approach as well on a phenomenological perspective. The experiences of female Members of Parliament under the quota system are a clear demonstration of the deep-seated structural deficiencies that underlie the society and are prevalent in the political parties. It is a demonstration that women’s demand for voice and participation is not only a gender issue, but a rights issue, and this is clearly stated in the constitution. If all other facets of society are changing, it follows that political parties must not be immune to this change and be brought to book for putting spanners in a matter that has been addressed by the supreme law of the land.

The participation of women in policy-making bodies, especially in legislatures, has been a matter of considerable debate in recent decades, and, in Africa at least, this is against the background of findings that women and men do not differ in their attitudes towards politics (Logan & Bratton. 2006). This debate over representation has been given added impetus since the Beijing Conference and the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, but, despite the debate, there have been only very modest gains. As UNWomen (2015) points out:

*Only 22.8 per cent of all national parliamentarians were women as of June 2016, a slow increase from 11.3 per cent in 1995;  
As of September 2016, 10 women are serving as Head of State and 9 are serving as Head of Government;  
Rwanda had the highest number of women parliamentarians worldwide. Women there have won 63.8 per cent of seats in the lower house;  
Globally, there are 38 States in which women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses, as of June 2016, including 4 chambers with no women at all.*

One approach to dealing with the under-representation of women has been the recourse to an insistence on quotas determined by a variety of different mechanisms. Some mechanisms are formal in that women must comprise a fixed percentage of seats in the legislature, whilst others are voluntary, relying more on the moral power of accepting gender equality and leaving this to selection within political parties. Zimbabwe, for example, accepts the principal of gender equality in Section 17 of the Constitution, and, explicitly in Section 17 (b) (ii), of at least “*half the membership of all Commissions and other elective and appointed governmental bodies established by or under this Constitution or any Act of Parliament*”.

**Table 1: Arguments for and against Gender Quotas**

*[Source: Trocaire. 2015]*

<b>Arguments for Gender Quotas</b>	<b>Arguments against Gender Quotas</b>
<p>Quotas for women do not discriminate, but compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of the political seats ;</p> <p>Quotas imply that there are several women together in a committee or assembly, thus minimizing the stress often experienced by the token women;</p> <p>Quotas can contribute to a process of democratisation by making the nomination process more transparent and formalised;</p> <p>It is in fact the political parties that <b>control the nominations, not primarily the voters</b> who decide who gets elected; therefore quotas are not violations of voters’ rights.</p>	<p>Quotas are against the principle of equal opportunity for all, since women are given preference over men;</p> <p>Introducing quotas creates significant conflicts within the party organisation;</p> <p>Quotas imply that politicians are elected because of their gender, not because of their qualifications and that more qualified candidates are pushed aside.</p>

However, resorting to quotas is not simple and is subject to criticisms, as shown in Table 1 above. On the one hand are the arguments that quotas will address the structural effects of patriarchy and the inherent barriers to women's participation in politics, not the least of which are the hugely different life roles carried by women and men. On the other hand are the arguments that this kind of affirmative action leads to inequality of another kind, as well as creating conflicts and not ensuring quality. As one commentator has expressed this, quotas can lead to a "backlash" (Krook. 2015). Challenging the notion behind the "critical mass" theory – the notion that once gendered representation reaches a critical mass, then women's empowerment and participation will strongly accelerate – Krook argues that this will be as axiomatic as the proponents claim. Here, she cites evidence of increasing violence and intimidation of female candidates. In addition, research into the ways in which political parties respond to the quota notion does not suggest that women have managed to subvert the "informal" power of the largely patriarchal systems within political parties (Verge & de La Fuente. 2014).

Furthermore, and also suggesting a limitation to the "critical mass" theory, other work in countries where women have attained a significant proportion in representative bodies, such as the Scandinavian countries, the evidence does not suggest that a higher proportion of legislators leads to greater participation in the socio-political life of those countries (Zetterberg. 2009). Using the data from the Latinobarómetro in 2005, Zetterberg demonstrates that female quotas will increase where noncompliance leads to sanctions, but neither sanctions nor quotas generally have any effect upon ordinary female citizens' participation, using measures as *political trust*, *political knowledge* and *political interest*. As respected feminist commentators have pointed out, there is considerably more to changing the lack of agency experienced by most women in the world than merely changing the guards (Cornwall & Goertz. 2005). Nonetheless, representation is not a trivial issue, and quotas are one way in which the gender imbalances in political power are being addressed across the world. Zimbabwe has not been immune from this trend.

### **Quotas in Zimbabwe**

The journey of the woman's quota in Zimbabwe is a culmination of years of lobby for inclusivity by the women's movement. It is also a legitimacy question given the role the movement played in the adoption of the SADC protocol on gender and its principles around women participation. Prior to 2013, Zimbabwe had a largely *ad hoc* approach to the issue of female representation. This was largely driven by moral considerations by the ruling party, ZANU PF, and in response to the pressures applied by the women's constituency within the party. This pressure was given added impetus by Zimbabwe's participation in the Beijing Conference in 1995, leading to considerable pressure being mounted during the constitutional process in the late 1990s for greater enforcement of women's rights. This was aborted when the constitution was rejected in the 2000 referendum, but most of the concerns were revived in the constitutional process from 2009 to 2013, and have been included in the amended 2013 Constitution.

The new constitution made explicit the requirement for gendered parity in all state and representative institutions. As pointed out earlier, Section 17 (b) (ii) requires a strong commitment to gender parity. However, as encouraging as the constitution may be, the fact remains that patriarchy is very present in Zimbabwe, and the consequences for representation

are highly influenced by the fact that men do not hugely support the notion that women can occupy legislative posts, but that women in the majority do not express the view that men are more suited to this role. Table 2 below makes this plain, and the trend from 2005 suggests that men changed their minds slightly in 2012 only to harden against women leaders in 2014.

**Table 2: Are men better suited to political office? (% stating “YES”)**

*[Source: Afrobarometer surveys]*

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Notwithstanding the difficulties inherent in overcoming resistance to women participating in governance, an attempt has been made to give effect to the Constitution through a quota system, based on an experimental proportional representation approach. The quota system in Zimbabwe is defined by Section 124 (b) of the Constitution:

*“The National Assembly consists of for the first time of the first two Parliaments after the effective date, an additional 60 women members, six from each of the provinces into which Zimbabwe is divided, elected through a system of proportional representation based on the votes cast for candidates representing political parties in a general.”*

This had the effect of guaranteeing 60 seats for women for a maximum 10 years in the National Assembly. From the women’s movement perspective, increasing the numbers of women participating in such structures as the national assembly would motivate other women to participate. However, there are already suggestions in political circles that section 124 be sacrificed as government explores avenues to reduce expenditure on public institutions as the economy continues on a downward trend. The relevance of this quota allocation is contentious, as many questions have been raised about how it was agreed that 60 seats would be reserved for women starting with the 8th Parliament in 2013.

Quota systems can be viewed in the same category as affirmative action and are aimed at addressing specific gaps that may have been caused, for instance, by historical or cultural imbalances. Some of the best known examples in Zimbabwe include the affirmative action at universities in the 1990s, where the objective was to increase access to universities for the girl child by lowering entry points, or given preference ahead of boys if they scored the same number of points. However, the success of gender quotas for representation in the legislature is influenced by various factors including the nature of the political system, the type of electoral or voting system, the type of quota system adopted, cultural attitudes towards the

role of women in society, and the nature of the parliamentary environment itself (McCann, 2013).

Whilst Section 124 was celebrated as a victory for women by almost doubling the number of women from 16% to 34% (WIPSU, 2013), there are critics that argue that these quotas serve to undermine the legitimacy of women who occupy them by placing a ceiling on women's political participation (McCann *ibid*) in the long run.

This report therefore assesses the experiences of women MPs under the quota system, and assesses how this has contributed to increasing women participation in the National Assembly.

## **Methodology**

This study sought to understand the women MPs under proportional representation views on their experience to date in the National Assembly. The study also assessed the views of male MPs on how they have seen women taking the opportunity to represent women's issues in Parliament. A series of 6 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) took place in Mutare and Bulawayo. These FGDs had a mixture of elected female MPs, male MPs and female MPs on the quota system.

Whilst the initial idea was to have separate groups of MPs under PR and those of elected MPs, the mixed approach proved to work equally effective as the MPs interacted frankly and in a respectful manner. There was careful attempt to balance MPs from across the main political parties, ZANU PF and the two MDC formations. Because of the amount of time and resource invested by the women's movement campaigning for gender parity during the constitution making process, a stakeholders' consultative meeting was convened to brainstorm how the research could proceed. The stakeholders were drawn from organisations that work with women at the grassroots, organisations working in capacitating women Members of Parliament and organisations that were driving the campaign for gender parity in the women's movement.

We also had Key Informant Interviews with 4 women whom were believed to have insight, knowledge and experience of the inner workings of the Legislature, having worked with women in various capacities for a period of time.

## **Electoral Systems**

As a result of male dominance in political leadership, the gender gap continues to widen despite decades of campaign by women to narrow it. This is a factor that is not unique to Zimbabwe alone, but a global phenomenon. There are many factors that affect the number of women elected in a country. These include cultural and religious attitudes towards the role of women in society and politics, an unsupportive structure for the multiple roles that women have to fulfill the prohibitive costs of campaigning and even the violence of politics.

What is critical to note is that *“the exclusion of women from decision-making bodies limits the possibilities for entrenching the principles of democracy in a society, hindering economic*

*development and discouraging the attainment of gender equality*". Studies show that the electoral system that a country engages for its national elections has a significant bearing on the number of women that are voted into Parliaments. In Zimbabwe, for example, politically motivated violence against women has been documented including its extreme form-rape. (RAU. 2010). Such environments discourage women from participation let alone contesting in elections. The violence is not inter-party but also intra-party and this accounts for the very few women who make it through to nomination as official party candidates. The same is true at local government level.

Countries that have PR tend to elect more women as opposed to countries that use other systems. This is because *in PR* systems parties have an incentive to 'balance' the ticket by including candidates with ties to a variety of social groups (such as women) and candidates who represent different party factions and constituencies. In majoritarian systems, by contrast, the incentives are different. Parties tend to field those candidates whom they feel have a 'realistic' chance of winning more votes than any other candidate. In most cases, party leaders feel that their top candidates are men.

### **Defining Proportional Representation**

Proportional representation (PR) is a voting method that ensures that representation in Parliament is equivalent to the votes cast for various parties by the electorate (Bogdanor . 1984). All proportional representation systems are intended to ensure that the number of seats that a political party wins in a legislative election matches the party's share of the vote cast in the election.

Proportional representation carries other significant political advantages. For example, PR can result in fairer representation for women (Amy. 2012). As a result of male dominance in political leadership, the gender gap continues to widen despite decades of campaign by women to narrow it. This is a factor that is not unique to Zimbabwe alone, but a global phenomenon. There are many factors that affect the number of women elected in a country, including cultural and religious attitudes toward the role of women in society and politics, costs of campaigning and domestic responsibilities. Their participation in politics is further constrained by poverty and lack of education and access to information, and, where poverty is common, women's primary concern is basic survival and that of their immediate family. Many women have full-time jobs as wives and mothers as well as other full-time careers (e.g. as teachers, lawyers or doctors). Becoming an MP in these conditions might then be considered a third full-time job.

In September 2008, Rwanda became the first state in the world to elect more women than men to its lower house (56%) compared to 22.8 per cent of all national parliamentarians as of June 2016, a slow increase from 11.3 per cent in 1995 (UN Women). Since independence in Zimbabwe there has been slow progress in getting women elected in Parliament. The following is the gender disaggregated data for the Parliament of Zimbabwe since 1980.

**Table 3: Gender Distribution in Parliament since 1980**

[Source: Parliament of Zimbabwe]

Elections	Seats	Men	Women	% of Women	
1990	150	133	17	11.3	
1995	150	129	21	14	
2000	150	136	14	9.3	
2005	150	126	24	16	

Quotas may aid in increasing the women's political presence, if they are done properly, as they help to raise attention to women's issues in policy-making, change the gendered nature of the public sphere, and inspire female voters to become more politically involved (Krook, 2010). The challenge is therefore for political parties in the second term of the 60 reserved seats to consider candidates on merit who balance party interests as well as women interests. It is too early to draw criticism, especially from male MPs, that the reserved seats are a waste of resources. Indeed, most of the women who came through the reserved seats have less overall political experience. This provides evidence of exclusion of women from electoral politics and explains why they have not been able to accumulate the same levels of experience as men.

### **Types of Quotas**

Quotas for women entail that women must constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body, whether it is a candidate list, a parliamentary assembly, a committee or a government. (Dahlerup. 2002:141).

There are two types of mandatory quotas:

- a) *Legislated* - Introduced through legislation that reserves a certain number of women on their electoral ballot. E.g Namibia has a legislated 30% quota for local government elections.
- b) *Constitutional* - Are provided for in the constitution which is the highest law of the land and cannot be overridden by any statute. This quota is mandatory and binding on all parties and the government of the day.

The constitutional quota is the route taken by Zimbabwe and this was achieved through years of extensive lobbying. However, Section 124 (b) only provides for two terms in which women have a guaranteed 18% of the seats in the National Assembly. Section 124 (b) reads;

*“for the life of the first two Parliaments after the effective date, an additional sixty women members, six from each of the provinces into which Zimbabwe is divided, elected under a party-list system of proportional representation based on the votes cast for candidates representing political parties in a general election for constituency members in the provinces.”*

### **The politics behind the women’s quota**

While playing a critical role in campaigning and drumming up support for their parties, women rarely occupy decision-making positions in these structures. From the political party structures to mainstream politics, the role of women tends to be constricted to cheerleading. This looked set to change with the inclusion of Section 124 in the new Constitution which provides for an additional 60 seats for women in the legislature. While quota systems significantly increase the number of women representatives in parliament, the effect of affirmative action differs. The manner in which the additional 60 seats for women was adopted has an impact on the role and performance of women once they became part of the institutional structure of Parliament. It also impacts on the interaction between elected MPs and those who came in through the quota system. But the problem of the overarching patriarchy is a fundamental problem.

*“Our women have been oppressed in this country. Before independence there was double oppression for women. They were oppressed by colonialism, they were also oppressed in the communities in which the men were oppressing them. ... So we said there is no doubt we need affirmative action and we eventually came up with the 60 seats set aside and they said okay what we are giving you is 10 years. ... Women don’t have resources. It’s a challenge for them to campaign and secondly there is also violence which affects women and issues like patriarchal thinking which is among our voters. When they see a woman and man they always vote for a man because the truth of the matter is the biggest number of voters in this country are women but these are the same women who are voting in men. So that’s the thinking. It’s attitude. It takes a while to change it. So the job we have now is to try and make those women who are in parliament shine out there”.*

Senator Monica Mutsvanga, Chairperson of the Women’s Caucus

The lobby for the women’s place in decision making was informed by the Women’s Charter (2000) during the constitution making process. The section on gender and governance was clear that it sought special measures embedded in the constitution to facilitate gender balance in the political and governance spheres, as well as a 50% representation for women in line with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. This position however met with resistance from the political parties as this would displace some male MPs who had deemed

their positions secure.

The 60 reserved seats was a compromise as men in ZANU PF and the two MDC formations collaborated and resisted the reserved constituencies for women. The system only sailed through after lobbying by the Women's Caucus to COPAC. However, MP for Chipinge South, Hon. Mutseyami, disagreed and argued that this issue of reserving seats for women was outrightly rejected by the people in the COPAC-led constitutional outreach programme. As such he does not see any attempts to amend the constitution to allow the provision that guaranteed 60 seats for women going beyond the prescribed ten years because the issue was rejected by the people, and only negotiated by the people in the presidium during the Inclusive government. The provision had to be limited to two terms as the argument was affirmative action cannot be eternity. Gender activist, Nestai Mushonga, however preferred to describe the whole outcome as "*a foot in the door and women can build onto it to get another facilitatory measure to balance the scales in political representation*".

### **The Shortcomings**

Many questions have been raised on whether Zimbabwe's system of Proportional Representation the quota system has achieved the intended objective. In terms of quantity, it has been a positive move as the physical presence of female Members of Parliament in the 8th parliament has increased. The additional 60 seats for women increased women's access to Parliament as each of the 6 female MPs in each of the 10 country's provinces has a defined constituency – women. The seats will ensure that the barrier (few women in decision making positions) is broken and that people are used to seeing women in these important positions. It will also encourage other women to take interest in fields that were culturally deemed to be for men. From the women's movement point of view, having women in the house is a milestone, an achievement for the women's movement, never mind their problems.

Whilst this might be the case, the real consequences have far-reaching impact. In the last (Seventh) Parliament, representation by women was 16% in the National Assembly and 25% in the Senate (Dube. 2013) The percentage of women in the Eighth Parliament increased, to 34% of the National Assembly and 48% of the Senate, but this masks an actual decline in the number of women directly elected, as the increase occurs courtesy of a new quota system (Dube.2013). The number of directly elected women representing constituencies decreased from 34 in 2008 to 25 in 2013 (Wipsu, 2012). There were reports that during the 2013 campaign period, female candidates were discouraged to contest in primary elections as they were guaranteed seats through the reserved seats.

The reserved quota fell short of what the women's movement was looking for. For instance, during the campaign for the quota for women, the idea was a permanent quota that would be integrated into the 210 seats that were already there and not something over and above. The timeframe set out to integrate women in decision making is half-hearted as there is no guarantee that this provision will be retained after expiry. It is important to appreciate that it is not just about numbers. It is about representation.

While the debate about enfranchisement of women and participation of women in decision making often focuses on issues of justice, equity and human rights, the representation of women and the inclusion of their perspective and experience into the decision-making process will inevitably lead to solutions that are more viable and satisfy a broader range of

society. That is why women should be part of the process and why it matters: all of society benefits as we end better and more appropriate solutions for our problems.

The mere fact that these female MPs have no constituency to represent immobilises them. Whilst the argument is that their constituency is women in the province in which they operate, this just goes to show that the whole process was rushed and was not thought through. Tabitha Khumalo is of the view that it was an insult to all the work on gender put over the years:

*I think it's an insult to the issue of gender parity this PR thing because at the end of the day the powers that be are more worried about numbers and not about merit because surely we have the numbers but what has been achieved on women issues? Nothing. {Tabitha Khumalo, MDC-T MP}*

The criticism is also in the manner of selection of the candidates on the party list. Some feel that a number of the candidates who were on the list were not there on merit and the 60 reserved seats were an opportunity by all political parties to reward their members for loyalty. It is one of the reasons why women who come in through the quota system have drawn so much negative attention.

### **The challenges**

We now have beneficiaries of the quota who were not part of the discourse of the struggle for the quota and that is the main challenge. So you have people who speak into the process but have no memory of how this came about. They have no understanding of where it came from and that is a major issue.

Many of the MPs under the women's quota do not understand their role. Whilst MPs have the three basic functions of law making, representation and oversight of the executive arm, the representation function it appears was not well considered by the political parties. This lack of understanding of what PR MPs are there for also cascades down to the elected MPs

The lack of a constituency poses a challenge for the women who made it to Parliament through the quota system.

*The Legislature is a fiercely contested space: there is competition for turf, competition for space. The area covered by a Senator when the Senate was returned is larger and usually comprised of 2 to 3 constituencies of the House of Assembly Member. So the Senator would say because my area is bigger I am also bigger, I represent a bigger constituency.*

*....And now there is an addition to the current system of the two - the Senator and the member of the National Assembly. We now have added a woman who represents the 60. So you realize we have competition for turf amongst those three. Who represents what? Who represents who?*

*We have incidents where if we want to have a gathering in a constituency for say a member who is there because of the quota the member of the National Assembly will say who authorized this. I am the representative of this geographical constituency. The Senator will also feel why are you doing this without my blessings, this is my constituency. So the current set up has actually increased the competition for turf amongst members.*

Stakeholder working with Parliament

This makes it difficult for the women under the quota system to relate with the elected MPs who believe their power lies in having a constituency and when they first came into Parliament, the women on the quota system were commonly referred to as “Bacossi”, a derogatory term coined during Gideon Gono’s tenure as the Reserve Bank Governor, where he sourced commodities that were in short supply and dished out freely to the public. There is not much respect given to the PR MPs because they are considered to have come in the National Assembly through the easier route and did not work for it unlike the elected MPs.

*They call them all sorts of names like ‘Bacossi’. Those are some the challenges that they face. ‘Bacossi’ is the common name that they get because they are told you are not elected properly, you are just there because of this system, so even their input is not as valued as the other MPs who were elected properly into Parliament. (Chikomborero Mafuriranwa. AWC)*

Some elected MPs grapple with the role of MPs on the PR and quota systems and tend to show them less respect. They argue that they do not represent the people but rather the party and hence the term Bacossi. The term is hotly disputed by PR MPs themselves as they argued that they are not newcomers to politics and have been there working hard for their respective political parties to win elections. This clear distinction is also made in the house when the issue of Constituency Development Funds (CDF) was discussed; the PR MPs were not entitled to the funding as they were deemed to not have any constituency to represent.

This creates hierarchies and seniority firstly within the Party and then, importantly, within the structure of Parliament.

*When you are a PR MP there are so many challenges because you will be staying in a constituency which belongs to someone. When you are doing something you are supposed to consult that person. They may think you are there to challenge them. Instead of working together they will think of plans to block you from doing any work in that area, it’s not easy. (Dorothy Ndlovu MDC-T PR MP, Bulawayo Metropolitan Province)*

As long as the constituencies to represent are not specified, the PR MPs have to lean on and rely on the goodwill of the elected MPs. Any successful or outstanding work will have to be dependent on the capacity of the individual PR MP to outmanoeuvre the politics, a capacity which is evidently lacking. PR MPs find it difficult to call for any community meetings or rallies because these moves are regarded with suspicion that the PR MP is looking to take over territory. So even if they have feedback or consultative meetings they have to rely on platforms presented by the elected MP.

This is a conflict area and it seems there is reluctance to address it as the conflict threatens political parties. The representative function of the PR MPs then becomes questionable if they are not able to consult members of the public. This is much easier however if the elected MP and the PR MP are from the same political party where they can strike an understanding on how they can work together. Even so, this is not as straightforward and empowering as it may sound given the political dynamics that are ever evolving and intra-party factionalism.

The whole issue of PR could have been planned differently to see what it meant in terms of women representation for the 6 women in each province. The MPs just know that they are MPs and have to work out a plan to function as best as they can and within their strengths and how much influence they have within their political party structures. This limits the size of the areas they can operate and are more inclined to function in areas that are accessible physically and practically. So it is almost a misnomer to call these MPs PR MPs.

Gender Activist and lawyer, Priscilla Misihairambwi, believes that the women's movement never had the chance to do an assessment of what the 60 seats that actually meant. This is in view of the fact that the quota has had particular repercussions in terms of how political parties deal with women and women's participation in politics. *"we went to sleep after the constitution after we got the affirmative action even though we knew we had a sunset clause"*.

One of the saddest parts is that political parties just decided to use the quota as a means to end their obligation to increase women on their candidate party list taking the issue off their agenda. An audit of political parties is needed in relation to the national constitution. Political parties should not be immune to this provision as the direction to address gender equality is already spelt out. Every institution of government must be directed by the constitutional provision including political parties and must be taken to task.

Other elected MPs have concerns about the mandate of the PR MPs too;

*Hypothetically let's just say they do manage to get issues from the constituency, whom do they go and address? Can they come to my constituency? Yes, but there is going to be a lot of friction because I am the substantive elected member and then there is this person that has been brought on board. {Ho. Thabitha Khumalo, MDC-T}*

The ability and capacity to participate meaningfully and effectively in Parliament is an issue that was raised by women and about women MPs. Many of the women are taking up their role in Parliament and are learning the ropes. The fact that they are hypocritically held to a higher standard means the expectations are higher. The women's movement has raised concerns on the spotlight that has been placed 60 women and how they have performed based on an unrealistic and disproportionate benchmark. A large number of male MPs who have never contributed to debate in the House have not come under such a spotlight, and the evidence is that their performance in parliament has been less than satisfactory (RAU. 2015).

In fact, women's attendance is a marked improvement in the 8<sup>th</sup> Parliament when compared with the 7<sup>th</sup> (Dube.2013), which suggests that the PR MPs are trying to do their job in their oversight role, even though their constituency roles may be very difficult.

In the first instance, these 60 women were never expected to come in and hit the ground running. The reserved quota is supposed to help changing attitudes about women in politics and also space for motivating other professional women to take up political positions in future. The seats are meant to get the country used to seeing women in such institutions as parliament. However, there is need for further studies to determine whether increasing women in the National Assembly through the gender quota will lead to greater attention to women's issues in the policy-making process.

PR is a way of empowering women and having more women in Parliament and other decision making bodies. To be effective Parliamentarians, it is crucial for women to understand how the system functions - the procedures, mechanisms and internal practices of Parliament - in order to utilise the rules better and devise effective strategies to advance women's interests and goals. This is evident from the experienced female MPs who are able to function in Parliament. They have been through the system, and understand how to operate within the space to be recognized and respected. They also have support within their party. These are the exceptions that have found voice and are newsmakers headlining the media. They have used their skills and profession to bring out issues that are not only women related but national in outlook. For example, PR MP Dr Ruth Labode has made headlines in her position as chairperson of the Parliament Portfolio Committee on health, using her background in the medical field.

However, women have made it clear that capacitation is needed especially for first timers. For women to deliver on their campaign promises, they need to be equipped with the necessary skills and strategies to ensure that issues raised by women are taken into account in the debate and the decision making that take place in parliament. Extending the scope of women's participation has to begin at the grass-roots level and in local elected bodies. This also constitutes an important step towards confidence-building. In fact, confidence-building was cited as the most important tool for women to have the ability to articulate proper ideological messages that articulate the values and aspirations of women in society.

Raising resources to fund their political campaigns is an arduous task for women, and, even if they are able to do so, it is not easy for them to contest with men especially in primary elections to represent the party. The low value for money is the accusation many male MPs have made saying that many of the female MPs have not contributed to the debate in the House. They have been reduced to beating tables and joining in singing protest songs in the house. Hon. Mupfumi described the presence of women as important in that they ensure that there is always a quorum as they take Parliament sittings seriously, but, in terms of contributions to debate, their participation is minimal. He admitted that there are certain male MPs who sometimes just come in to sign the register for the purposes of accessing coupons and their sitting allowance and leave the house to push their personal agendas. There is however debate in some political quotas to consider disbanding the 60 reserved seats:

*In terms of the budget, it's milking the country and other quarters have been arguing for the removal (of the reserved seats). Everyone believes the Senate is useful as a monitoring body but the PR from our side we don't need it. It's expensive and has contributed very little in terms of objectives. When the constitutional provision came ZANU was against this. It was lobbied through*

*the COPAC by the women's caucus.*

(Hon Dewa, Zanu PF MP)

The challenge of addressing gender parity issues emanate from political parties that have not shown willingness to do so. As much as Zimbabwe is bound by the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, political parties have not embraced it fully. In the 2013 elections alone, ZANU PF fielded only 13.5% female candidate, MDC-N 25.6% and MDC-T, 9.8%. This is where the problem starts and where it must be first addressed. Necessary political steps need to be taken to increase women participation and the failure to translate this into legislation at the local government level is a serious oversight because that is where issues affecting women are firstly addressed.

The party structures are designed to serve the interests of a few and they reward the women based on patronage. In the end, some of the women that appeared on the final party list got there not because they represented women in their constituencies but because they were in the favour of particular men who were in positions of power. The strong men in the political parties used that clause to reward and to use as a stick so that they did not pose as threats to their interests in the party. The nature, controversy and secrecy that surrounded the final party list on women on PR is a reflection of the undemocratic nature and corrupt nature of the political parties, and how they refused to subject themselves to the democratic principles of transparency in their own internal electoral processes, the very things they accuse the national electoral body of. There was no standard process of nomination of the candidates: one minute there was a candidate and the next minute the same candidate was removed, which continued up until the last day. This is needs redress as political parties cannot demand accountability on how the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission conducts elections yet they are unaccountable themselves.

It is perhaps the selection criteria for the women for PR that has drawn so much criticism.

*The majority of PR MPs just come to Parliament and sit. They are not there because on integrity to represent people. Most people brought there it was a way of being rewarded for the political journey travelled thus far. It was a mere system to reward from both sides of political parties to organise pension. The majority of them if assessed maybe only 20 have said something since they were sworn in. The majority are passengers.*

Hon Mutseyami, MDC-T, Chipinge

*There is very little participation that we are getting from the women that were seconded. I would like to congratulate MDC. They are vocal. The truth is the majority from ZANU are docile. I want to believe that it was as a result of the method that was used to put them into place.*

(Hon Dewa, ZANU PF MP)

*A lot of things are happening which are affecting women so if you look at the contribution that is brought in Parliament on the issue of women, not that I am bragging but that's a fact, we have at least three or four women in Parliament that I strongly believe do stand for women's rights; namely Jessie*

*Majome, Priscilla Misihairambwi, myself and Zindi from ZANU PF. You will find during debates, they will just sit there and not say anything.*  
(Tabitha Khumalo, MDC-T)

Political parties conduct primary elections to come up with the best candidate to represent the party in the general elections. This was however not always the case for the six women that were supposed to be representing the province. Other factors such as seniority in the party were considered to be on the party list.

Although the problems of capacity gaps have been identified, the media was also identified as contributing to the woes of female MPs. The reporting environment is skewed in favour of the male voice and trivialising women issues.

*For us to determine women participation, it will be determined by whatever we would be discussing in Parliament being brought into the public domain via the media houses. So if you look around in the media in this country, there is very few of us women who feature, even if we would have done something. They rarely pick up the stories that would have been raised by a woman. There are a handful of women that have made it into that domain.*  
(Tabitha Khumalo, MDC-T MP)

In a study that monitored how the media reported political stories (MMPZ, 2012), it showed under-representation of women and in the cases that the females were used as sources, attention was often focused not on their intellectual substance but more often on their gender and womanhood. Of the 625 political stories carried out by the public media, 85% belonged to males and 15% to females. The private media's sourcing pattern was no different. Of the 820 sources they used, 87% were males while 13% were females (MMPZ, 2012).

The scope of coverage is never about the substance of what the women talk about but in most trivial things that sell paper. For example the headline "*MP calls for legalization of prostitution*" was far from the facts of women rights being abused that the female MP had raised. Another headline read; "*MP brings out underwear in Parliament*", a sensational headline that suggests that female MPs are up to no good but stirring trouble in a society that is conservative. This tended to reduce women as trivial and a secondary group of people, whose existence was simply to give support to male politicians, whose political positions were already guaranteed.

## **Conclusion**

Attempts to achieve the "critical mass" of legislators, that is deemed so necessary to enforcing gender equity in representation, is laudable on the face of it, but it is not without its problems. The resistance to these 60 seats that was experienced during the campaigning was testament of the unwillingness to accept women as leaders within the political sphere, and was evidence of the patriarchy that is still very much a part of the Zimbabwean society. The possibility of extending the affirmative clause for women is highly unlikely as a result.

The challenge therefore is what the women's movement can do with the electoral reforms to ensure that this facilitates a process that does not lead to another quota but that compels political parties to bring in women on board. This shake up is necessary otherwise political parties will continue to pay lip service. The demand could be gradual in the first five years to say women candidates must reach a threshold of 40% and if that is not met political parties will be disqualified. This threshold can be increased to 50% in the second five years. is not necessarily a quota a structural electoral reform that forces political parties to bring women in.

There might also be need for supporting legislation to effect thresholds for women participating at the local government level to begin to influence attitudes about women participation in decision making bodies.

Thus, the increased proportion of women in the current setup is not really a route to achieving the critical mass, but seems rather a system of window-dressing. The real battle for equality thus lies outside parliament, in the political parties and the value they place upon women's participation. This is not to say that some of the current PR MPs have not benefitted from the experience, but the way to achieve the critical mass is not through a "trickle-down" approach, but the acceptance that women not only have the right to participate in parliament but in life generally.

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