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Analyzing representation and performance of women in the 2016 and 2021 elections in Zambia: A step towards gender equality

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Abstract

Women's representation and performance in politics and decision-making positions is very poor despite several legislation and policies being adopted to achieve equality between men and women. The results show that overall women's representation has remained below 20% in all the past elections at councilor, mayor or council chairperson and parliamentary level. Political parties are the primary and most direct vehicle through which women can access elected office and political leadership, therefore, the structures, policies, practices and values of political parties have a profound impact on the level of women's participation in politics. In order to bring about meaningful representation and performance of women in politics there is serious need for combined effort from the government, civil society, political parties, political leaders (Women and Men) and members of the public.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamental aspects of sustainable development. In the case of Zambia, representation and performance of women in various domains play a crucial role in shaping the country's social, economic, and political landscape. This article aims to provide an analysis representation and performance of women in Zambia, shedding light on the progress made, challenges faced, and the way forward for achieving gender equality.

Keywords: Representation, women, elections, Zambia, gender equality

Introduction

The International Republican Institute (2016) ^[3, 4] observed that even though women comprise half of the world's population; they continue to be drastically underrepresented in leadership positions around the world. Political participation and the poor participation of women in politics has been a major concern worldwide. For many years, various specialized agencies such as the United Nations (UN) have acknowledged the need for women to have equal rights with men in politics. Women are a major force behind people's participation in society today, as they play a critical role in posterity. Statistics on women's political participation in Zambia are very worrying because of the magnitude of the imbalance of women in the Zambian Parliament as compared to men. Prior to Zambia's independence in 1964, women fought colonialism alongside men but sadly for them, inequality and oppression emerged soon after. Women have continued to lag behind due to inherited colonial and cultural practices which exclude them from leadership roles.

The Non-governmental Gender Organizations Coordinating Council (2018) reveals that Zambia has failed to meet the African Union (AU) and Southern Africa Development Community thresholds of 50 percent women's participation in decision making positions. The Non-governmental Gender Organizations Coordinating Council (2018) further presents very disturbing insights in their 2017 report dubbed Terms of References for the End of Project Evaluation of the Women in Politics Project when they note that; Their participation is recognized as both a right and a requirement for effective development, and it is generally agreed that a critical mass of women in politics are needed in order to have policy impact (usually estimated at 30% of the parliamentarians being women. An array of international agreements and conventions has been meaningful in encouraging women to take up political office and influence policy making in different African countries.

Literature Review

Kunda (2016) ^[7] recorded that, women constitute more than 50.5% of the Zambian population, and accounted for 53.4% of the electorate in the 2021 general elections. Despite being a demographic majority, active participation of women in decision-making and electoral processes as candidates is very low. At the presidential level, only one of the sixteen candidates was a woman. At the parliamentary level, out of the 857 candidates contesting National Assembly seats, 181 were women. Additionally, only 96 women out of 437 candidates for mayor and council chairperson were chosen, and out of 5,693 candidates for councilor, only 565 were women.

In basic terms, governance is how society or groups within society organize to make decisions. According to the World Bank, it is the way in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development (Mutume, 2004) ^[11]. Therefore, participation in governance at any level is critical because it influences how power is distributed and used; determining who has decision-making power, how other players make their voices heard, and how accountability is given. Equal participation of women and men in governance and decision-making is key to achieving sustainable development. However even if women enjoy political power, they do so only in a particular arena different from that of men. Even though women have proven themselves to be better mobilizers of voters than men and their activism more distinct and unopposed, they are still considered subordinate to men in the political arena. Furthermore, even if not all women experience their subordinate political status in the same way, in most cultures there is a complex matrix of political power composed of many social hierarchies, of which gender is a major component and other social hierarchies such as class and education following. This explains why women's political status, access and influence cannot amount to that of men.

Kapasa (2016) ^[5] as quoted by Katongo (2016) ^[6] reported that, in Zambia like in many African countries, although women outnumber men, they are mostly on the side-lines when it comes to participation and leadership in all forms of decision-making, including in political office, constitutional bodies, public administration, the judiciary, and the private sector, as well as local, regional, and global development fora. This has led to the under-representation of women and directly impacted national development. Therefore, the government has committed to improving women's active participation in both the public and private sectors. For instance, the Constitution of Zambia upholds women's rights to equal participation, and freedom of assembly and association.

The report by Kapasa (2016) ^[5] shows that, as of 2016, the percentage of women in Zambia's parliament had declined from 18.7 per cent in the preceding year to 17.5 per cent. Women's representation in parliament is, thus, below the SADC and global average of 3.9 per cent and 24.3 per cent of women members of parliament respectively. While the number of women Members of Parliament decreased by 1.3 percentage points in 2016, their male counterparts increased in number by the same margin in the same year.

Zambia is a signatory to the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Article 4 of CEDAW says that, States should

adopt temporary measures to accelerate the equal participation of women in political, economic, social, cultural, and civil spheres (Bwalya, 2016) ^[1,2]. Zambia is also signatory to the 1997 Beijing Declaration and Platform for action which advocated for 30% female representation in decision making positions at international level, at regional level as well as the Southern African Development Committee (SADC) declaration of 30% in decision making positions. Furthermore, female members of parliament established the Parliamentary Caucus for the purpose of advancing the status of women in politics in 1997. In addition to this, the National Gender Policy was launched in 2014 (Bwalya, 2016) ^[1,2].

On affirmative action; the National Gender Policy acknowledges that special measures (legislative and/otherwise), are necessary for the advancement of those who are disadvantaged due to gender discrimination (Kapasa 2016) ^[5]. And in line with this, the objective under decision making is to increase the participation of women in decision making at all levels of development in the public and private sectors and one of the measures identified under creation of platforms for women's participation in decision making is to lobby for a quota system of allocation of seats during local and parliamentary elections (Ministry of gender and child development, 2014) ^[8]. The preamble of The National Assembly of Zambia (2015) ^[16] reads; we the people of Zambia: Confirm the equal worth of women and men and their right to freely participate in, determine and build a sustainable political, legal, economic and social order. Part V, article 45 (d) of The Republic of Zambia (2016) ^[17] also states; gender equity in the National Assembly or council. In addition to all these, the establishment of the Gender Commission, the Mixed Member Representation Electoral System that allows for the use of party lists which is a good chance for the adoption of Party Gender Quotas (Bwalya and Nyambe, 2016) ^[1,2].

A 2016 study by The Zambia Elections Information Centre (ZEIC) revealed that, a notable yet disappointing aspect of parliamentary elections in Zambia is the low number of women contesting and eventually winning the elections. Only a small percentage of female candidates win their constituencies. This was despite the many political parties like the Patriotic Front (PF) pledging that over 40 per cent of their adopted candidates would be women (lusakatimes.com 2016). The ZEIC found there were fewer female candidates in 2016 compared to the 138 that stood in 2011. The United Party for National Development (UPND) had the most female candidates, with 29, while the Patriotic Front (PF), despite the aforementioned pledge, fielded only 24 female candidates.

It is notable that both the then incumbent PF and opposition party UPND nominated female vice-presidential candidates, who were very visible in the campaign period. The PF also had nominated a female vice-presidential candidate in 2016, Inonge Mutukwa Wina who was elected and served as vice president.

Women comprise half of the world's population; they continue to be drastically underrepresented in leadership positions around the world. Political representation and the poor performance of women in politics has been a major concern worldwide. Statistics on Women's political representation in Zambia are very worrying because of the

magnitude of the imbalance in Zambian parliament, councils chairpersons and Mayors prior to men.

Methodology

The study primarily employed a qualitative method while also utilizing the quantitative method to better understand the problem. The research design utilized here is descriptive in that it focused on outlining participants responses so as to generate meanings. The purpose of descriptive research design as applied here is to state the affairs as experienced by participants. The descriptive research design also helped in that it is not only restricted to fact findings, but the formulation of important principles of knowledge and solutions to significant problem. The study was undertaken in Lusaka district which is located in the Lusaka province of Zambia.

The targeted population sample was 200 participation, 35 were UPND, 35 PF, 20 Ward Councilors, 20 Mayors and some member of staff at the Civic Center. Others, were 20 members of staff at the ECZ and 20 members of staff at the National Assembly, 25 from the ZNWL and 25 were members from the NGOCC. The two political parties were picked because they have been performing and had representatives at all the levels of the positions that were being contested in both the 2016 and 2021 general elections.

Table 1: Name of the institution

Name of the institution	Females	Males	Total number
UPND	25	10	35
PF	25	10	35
ECZ	10	10	20
ZNWL	15	10	25
NGOCC	15	10	25
CIVIC Center	10	10	20
Ward Councilor	10	10	20
National Assembly Staff	10	10	20

The study used purposive sampling to select respondents as the study primarily employed the qualitative method while also utilizing the quantitative method to better understand the problem. That is, cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the study. The researcher had opted for this method to ensure that only key informants are allowed to take part. Therefore, the researcher purposely chose subjects, who were thought to be relevant to the research topic.

Data was collected through the use of questionnaires and interview guides to analyze the situation regarding representation and performance of women in the 2016 and 2021 general election in Lusaka. The interview guides were researchers-administered which increased responsiveness and provided explanations for some terms. Face to face interaction helped to capture the depth response to probe and encourage respondents to expand their answers and crosscheck information relating to how and why a given phenomenon occurs.

Data analysis is the process of systematically applying statistical and/or logical techniques to describe and illustrate, condense and recap, and evaluate data. Several analytic procedures provide a way of drawing inductive inference from data and distinguishing the signal (the phenomenon of interest) from the noise to present it in the data. The initial coding phase was completed through structural coding, in which the raw data (taken from brief notes collected by the

researchers during the interview) was labeled. Date was classified into narrative clusters. This aimed at making sense of what was said by the participants in the collected data and also highlight the main findings.

Findings

The findings showed that there was a total number of nominated candidates for the seats of Councilors, Mayor or Council Chairperson, Member of Parliament, Presidential running mates and president, total number of available seats, the total number of males and females who contested and the total number of male and female in the 2016 and 2021 General Elections.

A total of 4,566 were nominated candidates for the 1,624 positions of councilor in 2016. A total of 427 women and 4,141 men were nominated as contestants out of whom 125 women and 1,499 men managed to win the elections. For the positions of Mayor/Council chairpersons, there were a total of 332 nominees for the 115 available seats of which 293 were men and 39 were women. The elections produced 106 males and 9 females as winners. At parliamentary level, 651 candidates contested the elections for the available 156 seats. Of these contestants, 106 were female and 454 were male. After the elections, 26 females and 130 males emerged as winners. The position of presidential running mate had 9 contestants for the single position available. Of these 3 were female and 6 were male and 1 female emerged as winner. The position of president was contested by 9 candidates of whom 8 were male and only 1 female. A male candidate emerged as winner for the single position.

However, 5,693 candidates contested for the 1,858 positions of councillor in 2021. Of whom 565 were female and 5,128 were male. After the elections, 132 females and 1,726 males emerged as winners. As for the 115 positions of Mayors/Council Chairpersons, a total of 437 candidates contested. Of whom 56 were women and 381 were men. The election results show that 12 women and 103 men emerged as winners. The 156 available positions of Member of Parliament were contested by 181 females and 676 males making a total of 857 nominees. Of these, 20 women and 136 men emerged as winners. For the position of presidential running mate, 5 females and 11 males were fielded making a total of 16 nominees for the single available position were a female emerged as winner. On the presidential level, 16 candidates stood for election, of which 1 was female and 15 were male and a man emerged victorious.

A comparison of representation and performance of men and women in the 2016 and 2021 general elections shows there was an enormous gap between the two genders.

427 females against 4141 male nominees for the 1624 positions of councilor in 2016. Of these only 125 women won the elections as compared to 1499 men. The difference was even wider in the 2021 general elections were the ward councilor seats were increased to 1858. The total number of female nominees increased to 565 against 5128 men. There was an increase in the total number of women who won the elections from 125 in 2016 to 132 in 2021 against 1726 men. As for the 115 mayoral and council chairpersons' positions, there were 39 females against 293 male nominees in 2016. Of these only 9 women emerged as compared to 106 men. In 2021, there were 56 and 381 women and male nominees respectively. Of these 12 females won the elections as compared to 103 men.

At parliamentary level, the available 156 positions were

contested by 106 women and 545 men in 2016. Of which 26 females and 130 males won the elections. In 2021, there were 181 female and 676 male nominees of which only 20 women emerged as winners in the elections as compared to 136 men. In the year 2016, the single presidential running mate position was contested by 3 women against 6 men but in the end a woman won the position. Similarly, in 2021 a woman won the position which was contested by 5 women and 11 men. These results highlight severe differences between men and women's representation and performance in elections as can be noted from the results; there are decreases at councilor and MP level in the 2021 elections as compared to the 2016 election. The difference between men and women has continued to rise. Overall women's representation has remained below 20% in all the past elections at councilor, mayor/council chairperson and parliamentary level (ZNWL 2021). Similarly, the Positions of president and Presidential Running Mate (Vice President) are like the other positions always dominated by male candidates. There are very few women in the history of this nation that have ever stood for the position of president. To date only a few female candidates have ever contested the position of president in Zambia. These are: Gwendolyn Konie (for the Social Democratic Party) and Inonge Mbikusita-Lewanika for the Agenda for Zambia Party) in 2001, Edith Nawakwi (Forum for Democracy and Development) in 2015 and 2016 and Chishala Kateka of the New Heritage Party (ZNWL 2021). The presidential position was contested by 9 candidates made up of 1 woman and 8 men in 2016 and in 2021 1 woman contested the seat against 15 men. The position was won by a man in both elections.

A Member from the National Women's Lobby asserted that:

"The presence of women in politics has been low in both elections, though several measures has been put place with the spreading of gender equally, men are still dominating as presented in the above tables".

These results confirm the comments by the Nongovernmental Gender Organizations' Coordinating Council (NGOCC 2021) which stressed that

Female candidates, and women wishing to become candidates, face a number of challenges that are unique to them as a group. In particular, the role of patriarchy in counties like Zambia often manifests itself in cultural obstacles to participation (NGOCC 2021).

Traditional roles are expected of women in political events, usually in a supportive fashion.

Despite women having the inherent skills, competencies, and community networks necessary to compete as candidates, it is something that many, especially rural women, only consider once given the opportunity and support associated with training and mentoring. Having put themselves forward as candidates, they face particular challenges of bullying, lack of access to funding required to run a competitive race, and in some cases sexual harassment (NGOCC 2021).

Discussion

The respondents were asked to express their opinion on how the challenges hindering the meaningful representation and performance of women in Zambian politics. During the

interviews, majority of respondents were of the opinion that, political participation can be achieved when a considerable number of women come together and with a collective voice and press for their interests to be heard and met. It was learnt that this entails an active presence of women taking part in politics and making their voices heard through a range of activities such as discussion and debate, lobbying as well as activism in formal and informal ways. For the majority of the respondents, a widely shared opinion was that, since political parties have a huge role to play in accelerating or restricting women's parliamentary representation, they should adopt deliberate strategies aimed at promoting women's participation; such as reserving a certain number of positions for women and taking full responsibility for their nomination and campaign costs. These sentiments by the respondents conquer with the comments by Momba, (2005) ^[10] who stated that, in order for Zambia to bridge its gender disparity in parliamentary representation, it could do well to adopt and closely monitor a political party commission that supports and regulates the role and functioning of political parties, including setting standards for internal democracy, transparency and inclusivity. The set up standards could include specific gender considerations in party structures and operations and this may be comprised of measures that ensure women candidates get a fair share of the party nominations; establishing rules-of-the-game for campaign financing that also supports the less well-off candidates; and ensuring a broader party commitment to support aspiring female candidates (Momba, 2005) ^[10].

The respondents were also asked to identify examples demonstrating how organizations or projects contribute to increasing meaningful representation and performance of women at national and local level. Some examples provided by some respondents included,

Some respondents were able to identify examples at government level; the increase in the number of women nominated for elections and subsequent appointment into key decision making positions such as ministers is an example of a success stories that demonstrate how organizations or projects contribute to increasing meaningful political representation and performance of women at national and local levels. These responses can be confirmed by the Ministry of Gender (2019) ^[8] which in the Progress Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995 and the Outcomes of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly of 2000 indicated that, in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, Zambia has strengthened the policy and legal frameworks such as the revision of the National Gender Policy in 2014 to ensure equal opportunities for women and men to actively participate and contribute to national development, the enactment of the Constitution (Amendment) Act No. 2 of 2016 which assures women and men of their rights to freely participate in, determine and build a sustainable political, legal, economic and social order and the enactment of the Gender Equity and Equality Act, No. 22 of 2015, which strengthen the legal framework for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls; empowers women to participate fully in public and private affairs of the country.

Some example of projects cited was the training of more women in leadership skill and supporting female candidates with material and financial support were needed. One such project cited by the respondents was the one by the Zambia

National Women's Lobby (ZNWL). The ZNWL supported a number of women (over 300) who were contesting the 2016 and 2021 general elections. Although reports indicate that a large number of these were not nominated by their respective political parties (ZNWL 2021). Another example is that of lobbying and advocating for more women participation in politics. Among political parties, the manifestos and internal party system do help women to participate in politics have positively impacted on promoting women's representation and performance

The context in which these concepts are unfolding today also needs to be taken into account. For instance, effective political leadership translates to effective political participation and it is from the pool of active political participants that political leaders are identified and adopted. For example, the UPND government is made of only 4 Female ministers as compared to 21 Males. In other words, the pool from which these ministers were selected is male dominated. For example, results of the study show in the 2016 and 2021 general elections shows there was an enormous gap between the two genders at councilor level. There were 427 females against 4141 male nominees for the 1624 positions of councilor in 2016. Of these only 125 women won the elections as compared to 1499 men. The difference was even wider in the 2021 general elections were the ward councilor seats were increased to 1858. The total number of female nominees increased to 565 against 5128 men. There was an increase in the total number of women who won the elections from 125 in 2016 to 132 in 2021 against 1726 men. The situation was the same at mayoral and council chairpersons' positions, parliamentary presidential level.

Zambia can create an inclusive society that empowers women to contribute fully to the country's development and progress towards gender equality. The gender gap widens significantly as candidates for political office move from being eligible to becoming aspirants to finally being nominated by the party. It is therefore recommended that political parties incorporate rules that guarantee women's representation. When this commitment is unwritten and informal, it is much more difficult to devise strategies for women to break into the inner circle of power and harder to hold the party accountable when the commitment is not realized. If a party's internal organization is weak and the rules for recruitment are not clear, decisions tend to be made by a limited number of elites, usually men.

Even after the elections are over, political parties continue to play a central role in encouraging women's participation in politics. Therefore, this study recommends the following actions that parties can take in the post electoral period to promote gender equality and women's meaningful representation and participation in governance include: Conducting an assessment of the level of gender equality within the party, with the aim of identifying, and ultimately eliminating, any practices or rules that may directly or indirectly undermine women, Promoting gender-sensitive reforms to political institutions, such as changing the sitting times of parliament and the parliamentary calendar to accommodate parliamentarians with families, Ensuring gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in party policies, including by supporting gender-specific policy reform, such as combating gender-based violence or targeting parental leave or reproductive rights issues, and by promoting gender equality in areas like access to justice, health,

nationality, labor, land rights, social security and inheritance.

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