

AFRICAN NETWORK FOR WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

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Message from the Network's Secretariat

First, compliments to the New Year! May it be filled with success, prosperity and more importantly happiness and health.

Throughout the past year, the Gender Equality Network has been quite busy. What has kept the network occupied? First, taking stock of its accomplishments and reflecting on its identity led to a new name – **African Network for Women Parliamentarians** – followed by capacity building trainings.

In light of the network's newly articulated vision and objectives, key activities centered on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Two regional workshops (one in Western Africa and the other in Southern Africa) addressed the MDGs and the APRM by examining the gender dimension, and more specifically the oversight role of parliamentarians in the integration of gender in monitoring and evaluation of MDGs policies and programs and the APRM. Other activities included a videoconference on Women's Leadership in Parliament: Increasing the number and impact of women in the parliamentary process for Francophone Western Africa and a one-day Communication and Leadership Seminar for the Uganda Women Parliamentary Association.

As sharing of experiences among countries remains a pivotal element of the network, the newsletter provides an

opportunity for network members, current and former parliamentarians to brief other members about recent developments in their respective countries or their viewpoint on issues relevant and of import. In this edition, Honourable Callista Chapola-Chimombo of Malawi presents selected activities the women parliamentarians have undertaken; Honourable Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga discusses the numbers game in the pursuit of gender equality and equity; whereas Ms Monique Rwasa examines women's leadership in Burundi and its impact on the population.

Experience sharing is not limited to the wealth of experiences and knowledge parliamentarians have, whether currently sitting or not. Civil society organizations and Parliamentary Centre staff are also in a position to provide insights and information which can assist members in achieving successfully the network's vision. This is seen by Françoise Nicole Ndoume, a Centre staff based at the Centre's Senegal office, contributions, one on the MDGs and the other on parity in Senegal; and The Importance of Stakeholder and Parliamentary Participation in the APRM article by Nana Boateng, a researcher at the APRM Secretariat.

Also, accurate and reliable information is extremely valuable in ensuring effective oversight. As a result, this newsletter provides a series of website

The African Network for Women Parliamentarians is committed to improving women's participation in parliamentary decision-making processes and promoting gender equality.

links to publications and organizations that it hopes will be of assistance to its network members in their role as effective parliamentarians and advocates for gender equality.

Finally, the Secretariat would like to express its gratitude to those who

New Name! Clearer Goal! Same Vision!

By Annie Gingras
Program Officer
Parliamentary Centre

The Gender Equality Network, established in Addis-Ababa in May 2003 as a result of the development phase of the Africa Canada Parliamentary Strengthening Program (ACPSP)¹, has been operational for approximately three years. During the latter part of year two and the early part of year three, the Network initiated a self-assessment process to reflect on its accomplishments as well as its future orientation. Members felt very strongly that the Network return to its roots and focus first and foremost on training women parliamentarians. In light of the decision to refocus the Network on women parliamentarians, the Gender Equality Network was renamed to the African Network for Women Parliamentarians (ANWP). While network activities will continue to involve male parliamentarians and other partners such as civil society organizations, the mandate of the ANWP will focus on improving women's participation in parliamentary decision-making processes and promoting gender equality.

As a result, the African Network for Women Parliamentarians' objectives

have contributed not only to this newsletter and have participated actively in ensuring the success of the network's capacity building trainings and other activities but to all network members. It is with your continued dedication that gender inequality will be a thing of the past.

were streamlined and defined as the following:

- To increase the capacity of women parliamentarians in their legislative and oversight roles and strengthen the participation of women parliamentarians in leadership positions.
- To provide a platform for women parliamentarians to advocate and lobby for the promotion of women and gender issues in parliament and society.
- To offer mentoring to women parliamentarians and women contemplating entering politics.
- To serve as a resource centre/clearinghouse on issues related to women's political participation and other gender issues.

Although other themes will be addressed, the two main themes by which the above objectives will be met are:

- Legislative frameworks promoting women's rights and gender equality (i.e. Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), African Charter for

¹ This program is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) Canada Fund for Africa and managed by the Parliamentary Centre.

Human Rights, various legislation protecting women's rights); and

- Gender sensitivity and women's leadership within Parliaments (i.e. number of women members of parliaments, number of women parliamentarians in key positions, existence of quotas).

It is hoped that, with its new identity and clearer mandate, the **African Network for Women Parliamentarians (ANWP)** will be an important mechanism for women parliamentarians to not only find a

Senegal: The Long-awaited Parity has Finally Come!

By Françoise Nicole Ndoume
Regional Office Coordinator for
Francophone Africa,
Parliamentary Centre

Senegalese women have finally won a long and hard fight, gaining parity with men on electoral lists. In Senegal, women represent 52% of the 11.4 million total population. Still, their presence in decision-making bodies does not reflect this sociological reality. Women continue to play minor roles in political parties and at the community level. The figures speak volumes:

- Within the current government, only 7 out of 40 ministers, or 18%, are women; there is only one woman minister of State;
- In the National Assembly, where legislation defining the future of the nation is debated and passed, women are still under-represented: of the 120 members of the 10th Parliament only 22, or 19%, are women;
- Only 31, or 28%, of the 100 members of the Economic and Social Council of the Republic are women;

refuge for sharing of experiences and receiving the necessary tools to fulfill their potential as parliamentarians; but, also raise the profile of women in decision-making positions and promote gender equality not only in parliament but within their constituencies. However, to do so, all women parliamentarians must be willing to set aside political differences and share as well as mentor those around them to achieve the necessary results – that is for women to be heard and as effective as their male counterparts!

- Of the 470 regional councillors, 61 are women, that is 14.5%;
- Of the 4216 municipal councillors, 1133, or 27%, are women; and
- Of the 9092 rural councillors, 1043, that is 11.3%, are women.

The list is by no means exhaustive. Women are under-represented in most of the country's decision-making bodies. Recognizing that men do not have a monopoly on leadership qualities, the Senegalese Council of Women (COSEF), a forum for Senegalese women of all political stripes working in partnership with other women's organizations in the country, has been fighting for decades to put an end to women's under-representation in decision-making circles.

In 1998 and 2000, COSEF launched a campaign under the banner "**Democracy, where are you?**" In 2006, under the leadership of the Honourable Haoua Dia THIAM, co-chair of the Africa-Canada Parliamentary Strengthening Program (ACPSP) of the Canadian Parliamentary Centre, COSEF devised a new slogan:



"...parity is not a women's issue, but rather a democratic issue..."

Hon. Houa Dia Thiam,
ACPSP Co-president and
Senegal Member of Parliament



Hon. Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga

“Strengthening Democracy through Parity: Parity is our Heritage” to send the message that parity is not a women’s issue, but rather a democratic issue and that no democracy would survive political discrimination against women, who make up the majority of the population.

After intense advocacy and lobbying efforts targeted at political party leaders and the government in November and December of 2006, Senegalese women’s appeal eventually found a favourable echo with two of the country’s major bodies and with the public as well. On December 1st, 2006, the National Assembly passed the Resolution on Parity, and on that same day, the amendments to mainstream gender in the Electoral Code, specifically in sections 3 and 4, were passed unanimously. On December 11th, 2006, the President of the Republic

decided in Cabinet to set up a National Commission on Parity.

The 2007 legislative elections will usher in a strong female presence on all political party lists. The 11th Parliament is also expected to see a significant increase in women’s representation. However, the road towards the fulfilment of women’s human rights is still long, given all the economic and cultural stumbling blocks that continue to exist. The presence of women in the next parliament will not merely be a matter of arithmetic. Women will have to seize this opportunity to initiate the substantive reforms needed to be able to overcome the major societal challenges.

We dare to believe that, like Rwanda with its best practice in terms of women’s political representation in decision-making bodies, Senegal will serve as a model for other countries in the continent.

Do Numbers Really Matter...

By Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga
Opposition Member and Chairperson of
Public Accounts Committee,
Parliament of Zimbabwe, Co-chair for the
African Network for Women
Parliamentarians (ANWP)

Ever since the Women’s Conference in Beijing ’95, debate on women’s issues has taken centre stage, more specifically that of women and politics! A decade later, there has been pronouncement, policy position and resources allocated to improve the women’s representation in politics!

Our part of the World (Africa) has also seen some shift in policy position. It certainly has not been “business as usual”. SADC, for example, has declared that there should be a 30% women representation in decision

making by 2005, a figure that has been met or in some cases been surpassed! The African Union (AU) has set the limit to 50%, hence the 50-50 debates in almost all the countries from Africa!

However, what has been missing in all this is a deeper analysis on whether the institutions in which women are entering are “women friendly”. The subject of my discussion is whether numbers provide the required framework to affectively participate in Parliament!

Whilst Beijing ’95 did bring the subject of political representation to the centre of governance, it, in my view, also brought in a view that is, at worst, destructive to the efforts

of women's movements and at best, naïve and unless we are vigilant, the results of the discourse developed in Beijing '95 may not be what we expected!

The GAD (gender and development) concept in my view has popularized an approach that believes in numbers (hence the preoccupation with declarations and quotas). At a very technical level, the GAD concept is a useful tool for developing strategy that is relevant and focused, however, what has been popularized is not the tool, it is the word (gender) and, it is loosely and simply used to mean that we are in an era where every program, every space, is made women friendly by including both men and women (how many times in workshops have you heard the statement, gender is about men and women!?). This thinking is warped since we know that the oldest institution we have known, as human being that has brought in a man and woman is heterosexual marriage and yet the fact that each gender is represented has not made it a place sensitive to women! I dare argue that it is probably the worst place for a woman in terms of the abuse that women have experienced!

I argue therefore that even with a 50-50, unless the fundamentals of these patriarchal institutions change, having more women will not shift the balance of power!

I have been a Member of Parliament since the year 2000 and, in all the seven years I have spent the better part of these years struggling with the system and procedure that makes it almost difficult or impossible to perform!

At a very basic level, the sitting arrangement almost invariably defines

that you change your dressing, the parliamentary front benches are designed for males in trousers, attempting to put on a short skirt or suit would mean a particular sitting posture, this may sound trivial but, for women, this is a fundamental change! My wardrobe is now 90% trousers (not by choice). In short, I have been co-opted into the male dressing!

During the colonial era, most parliamentarians in Zimbabwe were farmers so, Parliament today sits from 2:15pm and it means therefore it ends after 7pm and where there is serious business of the House, we can sit until 12 midnight! As a mother, it means I have to live a life where I cannot do homework with my child, nor tuck him to bed (working mums will understand the guilt that goes with this!)

Men in general are socialized in being egoistic; they live and survive on confrontation! It is rarely about consensus! In fact, aggression is almost a prerequisite for the job! Women are socialized to negotiate! Our reproductive roles demand that we constantly are negotiating something you have to unlearn when you enter Parliament, which is why women's issues are usually trivialized because they do not fit the framework! How do you speak to the issues of psychological abuse in an environment that believes that jeering and poking fun at an opponent is legitimate (just read the comments in Parliamentary debates on Domestic Violence).

Unless and until the process, procedure and the culture of Parliament changes, changing numbers will not make a difference! It may look good on paper but, in reality, it will only be a red herring!

"Unless and until the process, procedure and the culture of parliament changes, changing numbers will not make a difference!"

Hon. Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga, ANWP Co-Chair and Member of Parliament, Zimbabwe

The African Network for Women Parliamentarians (ANWP) focused on the MDG issue in 2006

Françoise Nicole Ndoume
Regional Office Coordinator for
Francophone Africa, Parliamentary Centre



Françoise Nicole Ndoume



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On September 8th, 2000, a number of African countries adopted the Millennium Declaration at the United Nations General Assembly. The Millennium Declaration defined a vision for “**A Better World For All**” by the target date of 2015: a world where the scourge of extreme poverty would have been halved; where universal schooling would provide young girls and boys equal opportunities both in school and eventually in their social, political and economic lives; where child and maternal mortality would be reduced; where the future of generations would be preserved by ensuring natural resources conservation; where there would be more equity and more cohesion.

This vision is embodied in 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with 18 quantifiable targets or sub goals. The MDGs were the culmination of a decade of international development objectives stemming from agreements and resolutions adopted at UN conferences during the 1990s. Forty eight (48) consensus indicators measuring country-by-country progress were developed through international discussions on the MDGs.

Seven years after the MDG were adopted, a number of achievements have been made by several countries in the areas of human development and democratic governance. The sub-regional workshop on the **monitoring and evaluation of**

gender mainstreaming in MDGs policies and programmes and the APRM implementation, organized by the Canadian Parliamentary Centre and the UNDP in partnership with the National Assembly of Burkina Faso, was aimed at building the capacities of women parliamentarians (i) to develop legislative agendas and (ii) to monitor the mainstreaming of gender in the national policies and programmes geared towards the implementation of the MDGs and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The workshop provided an opportunity to assess in a non-exhaustive way progress made by some West African francophone countries, including Benin, Niger and Senegal.

Benin focussed its efforts on the 1st Goal, *Reduce by half extreme poverty and hunger by 2015*. To fight poverty, which affects more women than men and various social groups inordinately, Benin developed strategies contained in two reference documents: the Government Action Plan (PAG II) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

Achieving these different yet equally important goals depends on individual country requirements. For Benin, the following were identified as essential:

- Reduce the mortality rate among children under 5 (4th Goal); Improve maternal health (5th Goal); Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (6th Goal); Achieve universal primary education (2nd Goal); Ensure environmental sustainability (7th Goal); Promote gender equality and empower women (3rd Goal).

As for the MDG-related programmes and policies, these are part

of the above-mentioned documents and driven by the following:

- Reinforcing macroeconomic structures in the medium term; developing human capital; managing the environment; enhancing good governance and building institutional capacities; promoting sustainable employment; improving access to basic education, literacy, primary health care, and drinking water; combating HIV/AIDS and malaria; fighting corruption; strengthening democracy and decentralization; building the capacity of poor people to carry out income-generating activities.

Some of the most gender-mainstreamed policies included the following:

- Education and literacy through free schooling for young girls in rural areas; primary and maternal health care through a programme to fight sanitary poverty; access to drinking water through village hydraulics.

In **Niger**, many sectoral strategies and policies were developed by the government in a number of areas, including education, healthcare, rural development, microfinance, national information and communication infrastructure (the Nici Plan), land management, national demographic policy and women's promotion.

A comparative analysis of the MDGs and the priorities of the national poverty reduction strategy provide evidence that the MDGs were taken into account in this reference document which was adopted in 2002 and which represents the only consensual framework underlying Niger's economic, financial and social policies.

Niger has achieved some progress towards some of the MDGs.

Measurable progress has been made with respect to people's access to basic social services, particularly in the areas of education, healthcare and access to drinking water. For example, the rate of basic schooling increased from 45.4% in 2002/2003 to over 50% in 2003/2004; the expansion rate of health facilities was 65% in 2003, up from 56.35% in 2002; and drinking water coverage improved both in urban areas (50% in 2002 up to 75% in 2004) and in rural areas. In the energy sector, the rate of electrification jumped from 5.4% in 2000 to 10.95% in 2004 to over 30.15% today.

Senegal decided that among the eight (8) MDGs, reducing extreme poverty and hunger was the one to which it would devote the most attention. The following are the most essential MDGs, in order of priority as set by Senegal:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability

Among MDGs-related programmes and policies fully gender-mainstreamed include the following:

- A new Ministry of Female Entrepreneurship, Microfinance and SMEs was set up to address women's access to credit in order to combat poverty which is increasingly affecting women;

MDGs at a Glance

- 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**
- 2. Achieve universal primary education**
- 3. Promote gender equality and empower women**
- 4. Reduce Child Mortality**
- 5. Improve maternal health**
- 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**
- 7. Ensure environmental sustainability**
- 8. Develop a global partnership for development**



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- A new Ministry of Youth was created to promote young entrepreneurs through a credit fund;
- A recreational structure for children; and
- A Toddlers Hut for children 0 to 4 was built.

On another front, Senegal passed the following legislation:

- Legislation banning female genital mutilation (FGM);
- Legislation against panhandling.

The above-mentioned examples bring out similarities and differences among the various countries.

With respect to the similarities, the following could be observed:

- Poverty reduction is a major concern for various countries in the implementation of the MDGs. This concern is translated into national poverty reduction plans, programmes and policies.
- In this context, education and healthcare stand out as areas where efforts were made to promote gender equality.
- Each country appears to have worked on passing legislation to promote gender equality and empower women.

In terms of differences, particularly the specific actions taken by various countries to promote gender equality and achieve the MDGs, they include:

- Combating sexual harassment in Benin
- Providing free access to C-section procedures in Mali
- The existence of an operational classification and prioritization of actions to promote gender equality and empower women in Niger

- Implementation of a legal framework to combat forced marriage and FGM, and to promote women entrepreneurs in Senegal
- Promoting social dialogue; drafting a bill on political quotas in Burkina Faso
- Establishing a 30% mandatory quota for women in decision-making positions in Burundi
- Setting up a training centre for women in politics in the Congo.

Despite all the efforts, the road towards reaching the MDGs by 2015 is still long. The actions taken so far remain insufficient to achieve all the MDGs, and more specifically the 3rd Goal. Today, the issues of gender equality and female capacity-building appear to have become crucial to the attainment of the goals of human development and poverty reduction in Africa. This issue is at the core of the 3rd MDG and is, in most cases, specifically identified in national governments' policies and programmes. However, reinforcement is needed, and so is an effective monitoring of policies and programmes from a gender perspective as well as the mainstreaming of gender in the development and implementation of legislative agendas. These are cooperation and programming tools that could be used to take into account national development issues and translate them into legislation.

At the end of their proceedings, the West African women parliamentarians and members of the Centre appreciated the content of the presentations and the quality of the facilitators. They suggested introducing other indicators for the various MDGs (see Parliamentary Centre's Website: www.parlcent.ca).

Building on the lessons learned, the women parliamentarians made the following recommendations:

1. Adopting legislation to establish a 30% quota in the legislatures and appointed positions of the various countries.
2. Getting actively involved in the MDGs and APRM-related

The Importance of Stakeholder and Parliamentary Participation in the APRM

by Nana A. Boateng
Research Analyst, APRM Secretariat

About the APRM

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) is an African-owned and managed process. It is voluntary in nature and participation in the process is open to all Member States of the African Union (AU). The core guiding principles of the APRM are that every review should be: technically competent; transparent; credible; and free of political manipulation. The overarching goal of the APRM is for all participating countries to accelerate their progress towards adopting and implementing the NEPAD priorities and programmes, achieving the mutually agreed objectives and compliance with best practice in respect of each of the areas of governance and development.

The APRM seeks to foster the adoption of policies, standards and practices that lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub-regional and continental economic integration through sharing of experiences and reinforcement of

policies and programmes evaluation process.

3. Involving more men to lobby on different issues.

The participants also expressed an interest in another training session for a greater number of parliamentarians feeling it is imperative to co-opt men parliamentarians, invaluable partners in all gender-related issues.¹

successful best practices, including identifying deficiencies, and assessing the needs for capacity building of participating countries. Thus, the APRM promotes peer learning and capacity building by exercising constructive peer dialogue and persuasion thereby making the process effective, credible, and acceptable.

The APRM has been given a wide scope. It measures a country's performance in the following four substantive areas: Democracy and political governance; Economic governance and management; Corporate governance; and Socio-economic development.

The APRM has the potential to:

- Hold leaders accountable;
- Make all forms and levels of governance transparent;
- Seek collective sustainable and equitable solutions to common problems;
- Put into motion a strategic re-orientation towards the validation of universal as well as African Values and;
- Accelerate the process of intra-African technical cooperation.



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¹ A similar workshop was conducted in Malawi for parliamentarians from Southern Africa. Details of this workshop can be found at www.parlcent.ca.

APRM Focus Areas

- **Democracy and political governance**
- **Economic governance and management**
- **Corporate governance**
- **Socio-economic development**

"...parliamentarians should sensitize their constituencies, debate the self-assessment reports in parliament and exercise their oversight role during the implementation of the PoA (program of action)."

Nana Boateng,
APRM Secretariat

Importance of Stakeholder Involvement

As a policy, the APRM puts strong emphasis on finding ways to involve all elements of civil society including rural populations, religious groups, trade unions, the media, women and youth, and the private sector in the APRM at country and continental levels. The importance of information dissemination to civil society both at national and continental level is stressed.

The APRM process requires a concerted effort from member countries to involve stakeholders so as to create awareness and ownership of the process. Key stakeholder groups, also including cabinet, parliament and the judiciary must be engaged and sensitized with regard to the APRM. Targeted efforts must also be made to involve stakeholders at the grass roots, marginalized groups, rural and urban poor.

Aside from fostering country ownership, stakeholders play an important role of developing and monitoring the implementation of the Programme of Action—a key requirement of the APRM. The APRM believes that by asking countries to draw up a Programme of Action (PoA), participating countries will have the incentive to seriously implement policies and initiatives. A PoA with costed and clear time-bound objectives, involving all stakeholders, not just government, is critical to the success of the development objectives of African countries.

Role of Parliament

Experience has shown that involving members of parliament at the onset of the APRM process significantly enhances stakeholder awareness as parliamentarians are typically mandated to periodically engage with their constituencies. Therefore, they are able to popularise the APRM and demystify the process at grassroots level.

Some of the countries that have reached an advanced stage in the APRM process tabled their self-assessment reports before parliament for discussion. In South Africa, members of parliament organised their own public hearings, collated the information, and made a substantial submission to the National Governing Council – the body charged with overseeing the implementation of the APRM at country level – which then integrated the parliamentary input into the self-assessment report. At the level of the continental APRM Secretariat, the reports of Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda, once reviewed and discussed by Heads of State, were tabled before the Pan-African Parliament in 2006 for their information and discussion. This goes to show that the APRM views members of parliament as important to the success of the APRM.

Given its oversight role, parliamentarians also have a key role to play in ensuring that governance challenges that emerge from the self-assessment are reflected in the PoA and are being implemented by government in partnership with all stakeholders. As gender mainstreaming has increasingly become important in policy implementation, here again, parliamentarians can monitor the APRM process to ensure that gender concerns are integrated in all levels/stages of implementation.

Conclusion

The APRM Secretariat therefore strongly encourages all stakeholders, including members of parliament to sustain and strengthen their interest in and commitment to the APRM process. As much as possible, parliamentarians should sensitise their constituencies, debate the self-assessment reports in parliament and exercise their oversight role during the implementation of the PoA.

The African Network for Women Parliamentarians (ANWP) believes strongly in creating partnerships and collaboration. Although, it may not always be feasible for the Centre or the ANWP per se to collaborate with other organizations and/or donors, women parliamentarians who belong to ANWP are involved in other activities compatible to the overall mission of the ANWP. Such is the case in Malawi, where women parliamentarians led by example by voluntarily being tested for HIV/AIDS and where they have worked tirelessly in increasing the number of women in decision-making positions. The following article, describes example of activities undertaken by Malawi women parliamentarians contributing towards the ANWP mandate.

Malawi: Women Parliamentarians Do Not Remain Idle!

By Callista Chapola-Chimombo
Deputy Minister for Local Government and Rural Development and Secretary for the Women's Caucus, Parliament of Malawi, Advisory Committee Member of the African Network for Women Parliamentarians (ANWP)

Malawi Women Parliamentarians go for HIV/AIDS VCT

Nearly one in every ten people in Malawi is suffering from HIV/AIDS. And every family has either been affected or infected with HIV/AIDS.

Women members of Parliament in Malawi recently participated in an HIV/AIDS Workshop co-sponsored by Women's Campaign International of Pennsylvania, USA and the country's First Lady's Non Governmental Organisation - The Ethel Muntharika Foundation. The objective of the workshop was to sensitize women members of parliament on HIV/AIDS Awareness, Prevention and Voluntary Testing and Counselling (VCT).

The women agreed that, today, to be a leader in Africa is to get involved in the battle against the pandemic. They felt that as Parliamentarians they occupy a unique position to spread awareness, prevention and VCT advocacy messages since they are always with the people.

During the workshop 15 of the MPs were courageous enough to be tested for HIV and vowed to encourage their constituents to do the same. The feeling amongst these 15 MPs was that when a person knows their status they become more responsible and they also begin to look after themselves so as not to catch the disease. Otherwise, the feeling amongst many people is that "everyone has the disease, why bother" and this attitude does not help in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Some of the constituents have followed their MPs footsteps and the role modeling by such leaders has encouraged many people especially fellow women to go through the process.

High Profile Women's Meeting in Mangochi, Malawi, Southern Africa

In Malawi UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) has been working with women in decision making positions to lobby government to increase the number of women in leadership positions but also to see to it that appropriate gender equality and equity legislation is passed in Parliament.

Malawi is a signatory to many international and regional protocols aimed at women's equal access to and full participation in development.



Hon. Callista Chapola-Chimombo



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For example, it is a signatory to CEDAW and the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development. Under SADC Malawi agreed to having not less than 30% women in leadership positions, yet statistics show that this percentage has not yet been achieved in almost all sectors of society. Further to this, violence against women is on the increase to the extent that not a week passes without reading saddening news on the cruelty that women are facing in their everyday lives.

With this background, UNFPA conducted several sensitization workshops on domestic violence. Participants to these workshops were mainly women parliamentarians and members from civil society. Together they lobbied Government for the



Courtesy of Hon. Chapola-Chimbo



Courtesy of Hon. Chapola-Chimbo

Female Leadership in Burundi and Its Positive Impact on the Population

by Monique Rwaso
Former Member of the National Assembly of Burundi

The increased representation of women in decision-making bodies resulting from the June 2005 elections is starting to bear fruit. The key positions held by women, including the speakership of the National Assembly and both vice-presidencies of the Senate, are real opportunities benefiting the people of Burundi in general, and women in particular. Women are increasingly aware of the important role that they must play in the socioeconomic and political development of their country.

The bill on inheritance, matrimonial regimes and donations has just been translated to Kirundi (the national language) by the Association of Women Jurists. The translation was done at the request of Parliament and Government with a view to making the draft legislation more understandable to everyone before

legislation of the Domestic Violence Bill and this was passed in Parliament in August 2006.

In November 2006 another battle started to work towards taking to Parliament the Wills and Inheritance Act. And again UNFPA is continuing to work with the women and men of Malawi to ensure that this bill is passed in Parliament.

This initiative by UNFPA has given women the opportunity to meet and share experiences. In addition, women in Malawi have agreed to continue to dialogue with the President, Dr Bingu wa Muntharika who has promised to see 50% representation of women in all leadership and decision making positions.

enacting it, because the bill proposes far-reaching reforms to Burundi tradition; reforms which are required in order for women's rights to be established in Burundi.

The UN Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified by Burundi in April 1991, has been instrumental in helping women in Burundi advocate for their rights. Another instrument dealing with African women's rights that will prove as crucial will soon be ratified, namely the African Charter of Human Rights and Peoples.

Burundi is a country in a post-conflict phase, and as such, some abuses are unfortunately becoming widespread. Firearms are still in the hands of a large portion of the population and armed robberies are very common, despite the efforts of the national police.

However, one of the hardest challenges facing the country today is

rape of women and young girls with all the ensuing horrendous consequences. Burundi is one of the African countries most affected by the AIDS pandemic, and so these rape cases contribute to spread this terrible disease, not to mention the psychological impact that rape has on the victims.

Women parliamentarians, headed by the Speaker of the National Assembly and in cooperation with other women members of the government, have decided to take this problem seriously. So they developed several strategies to eradicate it. To this end, the criminal code, which contained certain gaps, is being revised to include amendments sanctioning more severely individuals who commit rape or violence against women. Health facilities were also set up in various regions of the country with the help of some local and international NGOs to care specifically for victims of sexual violence.

Recently, and for the first time, a protest was organized in Bujumbura by women's associations with the support of the Minister responsible for National Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender in order to raise awareness among the public in general and men in particular of the need to eradicate rape and all other forms of violence against women.

A regional workshop was held in Bujumbura by the Burundi Women Journalists' Association in collaboration with their female colleagues and neighbours from the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Rwanda. Its main purpose was to develop strategies to eradicate rape and other forms of sexual violence against women, which are widespread in the three countries. Among the participants was the Speaker of the National Assembly,

who was intent on showing support for this initiative. She seized the opportunity to say that the media can contribute very effectively to raising public awareness of the need to eradicate this scourge.

Comforted by the support of women parliamentarians and female members of the government, women from civil society are increasingly advocating for their own rights. A case in point: recently, young girls who had the misfortune of giving birth to a child before graduating from secondary school were refused the right to enrol again in their school when they wanted to go back. Women from civil society denounced this kind of attitude on the part of the school administration and demanded that that the decision be rescinded. They eventually won their case, and the young girls could attend the school. It was a real victory because young girls in Burundi were suspended from school as soon as they were known to be pregnant and were not allowed to complete their studies. They were "persona non grata" in all public schools.

Women from civil society, with the continued support of women parliamentarians and female members of the government, have also managed to ban marriage by under age girls (sometimes under 15) despite the consent of their greedy parents eager only to receive the dowry. The legal age of marriage in Burundi is 18 for girls and 21 for boys.

Burundi women are starting to feel the benefits of their involvement in politics. Clearly, they still have their work cut out for them, particularly in the socioeconomic area, but "little strokes fell great oaks" or so the saying goes. This very promising start bodes well for the future, and anything is possible.



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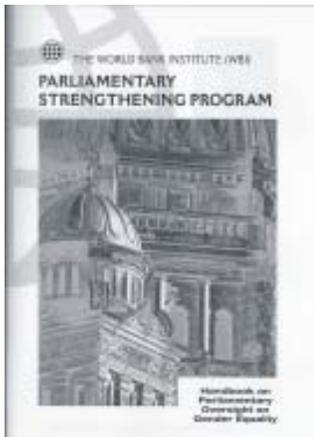


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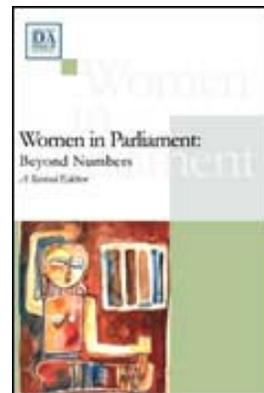
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PUBLICATIONS



Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers Handbook, published by International IDEA, covers the ground of women’s access to the legislature in three steps. It looks into the obstacles women confront when entering parliament – be they political, socio-economic or ideological and psychological. It presents solutions to overcome these obstacles, such as changing electoral systems and introducing quotas, and it details strategies for women to influence politics once they are elected to parliament, an institution which is traditionally male dominated. The handbook is available at <http://www.idea.int/publications/wip2/index.cfm>.

Handbook on Parliamentary Oversight on Gender Equality is designed to assist parliamentarians in carrying out their oversight role on gender by developing a better understanding of the concept, providing a summary of the budget cycle process, discussing gender budgeting, and examining the gender dimensions in parliamentary committees as well as suggestions for changing attitudes as a strategy for achieving gender equality. The handbook developed by the Parliamentary Centre with funding by the World Bank Institute is available at www.parlcent.ca.



Gender Equality Network Newsletter, published by the Parliamentary Centre is designed not only to showcase the Gender Equality Network activities but also serves as a mechanism to promote gender equality. The newsletter provides an opportunity for members to share gender-related advancements in their respective countries and key themes through a gender lens.



Websites to Remember

1. **The Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol Handbook for Parliamentarians**
<http://www.ipu.org/english/handbks.htm#wom-protocol>
2. **The African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa**
http://www.achpr.org/english/_info/women_en.html
3. **MDGs**
<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>
4. **NEPAD and APRM**
<http://www.nepad.org/2005/files/home.php>
5. **Parliamentary Centre website which includes links to the Gender Equality Network and other Parliamentary Centre Networks**
http://www.parlcent.ca/index_e.php
6. **IDEA, an intergovernmental organization that supports sustainable democracy worldwide has among its themes women in politics. For more information visit**
<http://www.idea.int/publications>
7. **Draft Report of the Regional conference on the African Peer Review Mechanism (Dec. 2003, Kampala, Uganda) by the Africa Leadership Forum. www.undp.org/agf/bdgcuments/Africa%20Forum%20Draft%20Report%20of%20the%20Regional%20Conference%20on%20the%20APRM%20held%20in%20Kampala.pdf. For more information about the Africa Leadership Forum visit: www.africaleadership.org.**
8. **World Bank Institute's page for parliamentarians provides a number of resources.**
<http://web.worldbank.org/wbsite/external/accueilextn/extabtusfrench/estparternsfrench/extparliamentfrench/O,,menuPK:64165869~pagePK:64165874~piPK:64165885~theSitePK:464534,00.html>
9. **Parliament, Budget and Gender**
<http://www.ipu.org/english/handbks.htm#budget>
10. **Online Discussion on microcredit (Parliamentary Centre initiative)**
http://www.parlcent.ca/africa/Gender/videoc_westafrica_e.php

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