

Women's Participation in Elections Across Africa

2012



Make Every Woman Count

Promoting the Empowerment of African Women & Girls

Founded in December 2010 two months after the launch of the African Women's Decade, Make Every Woman Count (MEWC) is a young African women-led organisation that promotes and advocates for the empowerment and rights of African women and girls. MEWC provide timely and accurate information, resources and tools to support and strengthen the work of African women's rights advocates, African women's grassroots, organisations and activists. Through its campaigns and publications, MEWC monitors and raises awareness of the African Women's Decade 2010-2020 launched in October 2010 by the African Union.

MEWC is both a platform for African women & girls, a space for shared ideas, and a voice for those who have largely gone unheard. Unlike many organisations working towards women's rights, we seek to strengthen the voices of African women and girls so that they can take the lead on Africa's social, political and economic development.

Mission

MEWC's mission is to ensure that African women and girls have a real voice in all governance institutions, from the judiciary to the civil service, as well as in the private sector and civil society, so that they can fully participate equally with men in the public dialogue and decisions-making and influence the decisions that will determine the future of their families, communities and countries.

Vision

MEWC's vision is a world where African women and girls are fully empowered to participate in the economic, political and social development and to influence decisions that affect their lives; a world where African women and men, girls and boys have equal rights and opportunities and equal access to resources, education, healthcare, employment, leadership and decision-making.

Email: info@makeeverywomancount.org

Website: www.MakeEveryWomanCount.org

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INTRODUCTION

The MEWC political participation and election monitoring team is excited to present our second annual Political Participation Report, reviewing all of the major national and regional elections that occurred in Africa in 2012. This report seeks to provide an overview of the role of women in elections across Africa in 2012 by focusing on women's political participation as well as female candidates vying for public office, before and after the elections have taken place. It is one of the only election monitoring projects in the field focused solely on the women's political participation and representation.

Our aim in this report is to provide an analysis of women's participation in African politics and to help to fill the void in election reporting in the international development field. By incorporating a range of perspectives and sources to reveal achievements and obstacles to women's political empowerment, we hope to provide a platform for feminist views and voices of parties and voters from across Africa's social, economic and public life.

The Political Participation Team has worked hard to provide accurate data and reporting and we will continue to improve and enhance our research in reports that come in 2013. As resources are limited and the team is small, our ability to instantly update information is hindered. Nonetheless, it is important to note that MEWC is one of the only outlets for election information specifically focused on women's issues and their participation and we hope to continue and expand this important work in the years to come.

SUMMARY OF ELECTIONS IN 2012

During 2012 MEWC covered 18 national and regional elections across the African continent. While in some cases we saw a significant increase in women's political representation there were also several notable setbacks. Yet, just as importantly, more and more women are now demanding that their voices are heard and taken seriously, both across local levels and in public discourse on a national stage.

In neither Ghana nor Guinea Bissau were there any female candidates, nor were there any female candidates on the final presidential ballots in Egypt. However, that is not to say that women's issues were absent from political platforms. In Guinea Bissau, representatives of seven out of the nine presidential candidates signed the Political Declaration on gender equality and women's human rights prepared by the Women's Political Platform. In Egypt women braved continued street violence to maintain their growing public voice in Tahrir Square. In Ghana two women attempted to run for president but were unable to overcome the early electoral screening process of receiving enough public signatures to officially enter the ballot.

The Gambia, however, had four female legislative candidates and Senegal saw two women vie for the presidential seat. With Liberia having re-elected its first female head of state just last year, the West African region is showing very important positive steps towards increasing women's presence in significant executive, decision-making roles.

In several instances during 2012, women and men were not able to exercise their democratic rights due to war, conflict and military coups. The second round of presidential elections in Guinea Bissau was postponed due to a military coup. Continued unrest and conflict lead the Democratic Republic of the Congo to postpone their legislative elections last year with the new date still unknown. The latest resurgence of violence in Mali has stalled any elections in the country.

Gender quotas have been increasingly used as a tool for increasing gender equity in political representation. Algeria became the first and only Arab country where women hold more than 30% of the seats in the parliament. This is a huge victory for women in that region and shows that the Arab Spring is still developing for women in North Africa. Even in Angola, a country still transitioning through its post-conflict period, the gender quota has

allowed for women to make up 34.5% of the parliamentarians. Sierra Leone failed to pass a gender quota bill, leading to the unsuccessful candidatures of many female legislative hopefuls. The remaining African nations which held elections in 2012, Libya, Lesotho, Burkina-Faso, Senegal, Somalia and Congo-Brazzaville, have all instituted some form of gender quota for party lists but as yet none of these reforms have been as successful as in Algeria or Angola.

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UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran Women queue at Giyada polling centre in Nyala, South Darfur, on the first day of voting in South Sudan's referendum on independence.

ALGERIA

Close to 21 million voters took part in the historic legislative elections on May 10, 2012. These were the first elections since the protests in Algeria during the Arab Spring. Although large scale protests had died down by the time of these elections, the memory of the annulled elections in 1991 which led to Algeria's civil war still weighed upon them.

Algeria has a bicameral parliament, consisting of a lower chamber, the People's National Assembly, and upper chamber, the Council of the Nation. The two parties in the ruling coalition - the National Liberation Front (FLN) and the National Democratic Rally (RND) - and a new coalition of three Islamist parties competed for the representation in the People's National Assembly (Lower Chamber).¹ Schools served as polling stations and were guarded by 60,000 police officers nationwide.²

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Although the role women have played in the political and social development of Algeria is often acknowledged in speeches and political rhetoric, women remain only marginally involved in major decision making bodies. Women's involvement had, until very recently, rarely touched upon on family law.³

Between 2002-2007, women made up 8.26% of representatives in local government.⁴ Women were not represented at all in the Algerian government for the first 9 years after independence. It wasn't until 1984 that Algeria's first woman was appointed as minister, and until 2001, the number of women in government did not exceed two. The elections in June 2002 saw the appointment of five women, one minister and four delegate ministers, but just four years later the number of female ministers had dropped again to three.⁵

GENDER QUOTA

Women's level of political participation in Algeria is not hampered by any specific legislative or legal provisions that prohibit or restrain women's participation in the country's political life, but there has been an absence of any legal provision that attempts to rebalance the great social and cultural obstacles to women's participation in the public sphere.

Prior to the 2012 elections some measures to strengthen women's political participation and representation were passed, including the establishment of a progressive quota for the number of seats reserved to women in part selection lists. 7,700 women candidates were presented on party lists, however, there is no stipulation to the order candidates must be listed nor how they are selected. This has allowed some conservative and religious parties to select wives and daughters as candidates' to make up the quotas.⁶ Despite these short comings, the quotas enabled women to make up 31% of the new parliament, increased from just 7% at the last elections.⁷

Louisa Hanoune (photo below), is the head of Algeria's Workers' Party (Parti des Travailleurs, PT). In 2004, she became the first woman to run for President of Algeria.⁸ The Constitutional Council had rejected her first bid for the 1999 presidential election. During Algeria's presidential election of 2004 she was the country's first ever female presidential candidate ever, leading the Algerian Worker's Party. She ran again 2009 winning under 5% of the vote in an election that was widely deemed to be fraudulent.



ELECTIONS OUTCOME

Of the 389 deputies elected to the previous Algerian National Assembly in 2007, only 31 women were nominated. Today the National Algerian Assembly now includes 146 female members. Comparing 2012's legislative election to 2007, women have made huge gains in terms of representation in the Algerian Upper and Lower houses. Algeria went from being the world's 112th place for the number of women in parliament to 28th place.⁹ However the National Council now has four women, decreasing from the eight women nominated to the body in 1997.¹⁰

Women's Political Representation Statistics

Political Representation	2007	2012
Number of Women in Upper House	4/129 (3.1%)	10/142 (7%)
Number of Women in Lower House	28/389 (7.2%)	146/452 (31.6%)

ANGOLA

Angola held its third legislative elections on August 31 2012. The legislative elections marked the first general election since Angola's new constitution came into force.¹¹ The new constitution enacted on February 5th 2010 established a party list system where citizens vote for a party instead of an individual candidate and the president being the leader of the winning party's list.¹²

Angola is currently governed by a president, vice president and 90 appointed ministers, deputy ministers and state secretaries; there are a total of 220 seats in the National Assembly.¹³ The current President Jose Eduardo dos Santos has held his post since 1979 and won the 2012 re-elections through the win of his party: the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ANGOLA

In the 2008 elections 84 out of the 220 seats went to women, resulting in Angola having a 38.2% representation of women in the National Assembly.¹⁴ Out of the 18 governorships in the country, women held three and nine of the 31 ministers in Angola were women.¹⁵

Throughout the electoral process in 2012, women were encouraged to take part in the electoral process and cast their vote.¹⁶ A 'Women Can Do It' programme was carried out with the aim of teaching women to see when dominating techniques were being used against them, as well as how networking techniques. 23 women from different organisations participated and were then expected to go out and encourage other women to take part in political and social processes.¹⁷

GENDER QUOTA LAW UNSUCCESSFUL

In the 2012 legislative elections five political parties and four party coalitions participated. Five out of the nine parties or coalitions adopted party lists that respected the 30% representation quota for women in their candidate lists, but no women were placed at the top of their respective party list and were therefore not among the presidential candidates.

ELECTION OUTCOME

According to the National Electoral Commission, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) led by President Dos Santos won the elections with 71.8% of the vote. Opposition parties formally contested the election results.

Following the legislative elections on August 31, 2012 women now make up 34.5% of the parliamentarians but in the 31 ministries there are only 8 positions held by women.¹⁸

Women's Political Representation Statistics

Political Representation	2008	2012
Number of Women in National Assembly	84/220 (38%)	76/220 (34%)
Female Ministers	N/A	8/31 (26%)

BURKINA FASO

Women in Burkina Faso face tremendous barriers to participation in elections, as in other democratic processes. Women are the poorest and most vulnerable segment of the population. Illiteracy rates for Burkinabe women are twice as high as for men; school enrolment is one-third lower amongst girls compared to boys; and a larger percentage of women are infected by HIV/AIDS than men.

Opportunities for women's political participation in Burkina Faso have markedly increased with an ambitious political decentralization programme completed in 2006. The decentralization process increased the number of local government communes from 49 to 359, and provided significant opportunities for greater citizen participation in politics, especially for women. Approximately 18,000 local councillors, of whom 6,400 are women, were elected to represent their communes in 2006.¹⁹

Incumbent President Blaise Compaoré has governed Burkina Faso since taking power following the assassination of President Thomas Sankara in 1987. In the November 2010 presidential election, six opposition candidates ran against Compaoré, who won with just over 80% of the vote. The 111-seat National Assembly is unicameral, and members serve five-year terms with only 16 women in the Assembly reflecting 15.3% according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS: 2 MILLION WOMEN REGISTER TO VOTE

On December 2nd 2012, Burkina Faso went to the polls for parliamentary and municipal elections. More than 3,000 candidates vied for 127 seats in the National Assembly, and more than 18,000 municipal officials are to be elected who will, in turn, appoint mayors for 302 rural and 49 urban communes.²⁰ Thanks to the newly introduced biometric registration system, the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) was able to reach the most remote areas at the height of the rainy season, registering 4 million voters, nearly half of them women.²¹

Female representation has improved slightly in 2012 with the application of the gender quota law specifying that at least 30% of the party lists for legislative and municipal elections be women. However, while women technically gained seats, statistically the percentage of women represented remains stagnate: from 15.3% in 2007 to 15.7% in 2012.²² The Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) secured 70 of 127 seats in the

December 2nd 2012 vote, while allies in the broader coalition secured a further 28 seats according to complete results announced after the election.²³

Women's Political Representation Statistics

Political Representation	2007	2012
Number of Women in Parliament	17/111 (15.3%)	20/127 (15.7%)
Female Ministers	N/A	8

CONGO BRAZZAVILLE

The legislative elections in Congo Brazzaville took place on July 15th 2012. The previous legislative elections took place in 2007 in which women won ten seats, or 7.3% of the 137 seats.²⁴

WOMEN IN POLITICAL LIFE

Women won the right to vote and stand for election on December 8th 1963, although Congo Brazzaville has never had a female head of state and the numbers of female legislators is still relatively low in comparison to the number of total available seats.

Nevertheless, Congo has had some notable female politicians such as Claudine Munari Mabondzo and Jeanne Dambendzet. Munari Mabondzo who also ran as a candidate in the elections and heads the Movement for Unity, Solidarity and Work party (Mouvement pour l'unité, la solidarité et le travail-MUST). Since September 2009 she has served in the government as Minister of Trade.²⁵ Jeanne Dambendzet was appointed to the government on 13 August 1989 as Minister of Labour and Social Security, holding that post until 1991.²⁶

This year's election demonstrated an increased participation of female candidates in comparison to the 2007 elections. In 2007, 102 women were listed as candidates compared to the 124 eligible female candidates this year.²⁷ Another change in this year's election is that the number of seats in the Assembly has been increased from 137 to 139.²⁸ Four women were elected in the first round, and six in the second round. The chart below shows each major party's gender ratio of candidates:²⁹

Women's Political Representation Statistics

Party	Female	Male	Total
Partie Congolaise du Travail (PTC)	16	120	136
l'Union Panafricaine pour la Démocratie Sociale (UPADS)	9	60	69
Le Mouvement Congolais pour la Démocratie et le Développement Intégral (MCDDI)	6	23	29

Le Parti Républicain et Libéral (PRL)	-	1	1
Le Rassemblement pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (RDPS)	6	31	37
l'Alliance pour la République et la Démocratie (ARD)	N/A	N/A	86
Total	124	1089	1213

CHALLENGES & OBSTACLES

While Article 61 of Congo's electoral law (May 2007) requires candidate lists to respect a 15% gender equity quota, political analysts and civil society organisations believe that the absence of strong legal framework is to blame for the low participation of women.³⁰

After two rounds the elections were won by the *Partie Congolaise du Travail* (PCT) and its allies, gaining altogether 117 of the 135 seats in parliament, the rest of the seats were divided between the MCDDI who won 7 seats, the UPADS won 7 seats, and 12 seats went to independent candidates.

Unfortunately women's representation remained low, with only 10 of the 135 seats being awarded to women.³¹ All of the women elected, apart from Claudine Munari Mabondzo of the *l'Union Panafricaine pour la Démocratie Sociale* (UPADS) party represented the presidential majority and five women represented *Partie Congolais du Travail* (PCT).³² Overall there was no statistical change in the number of women represented in the Congo's legislature.³³

Women's Political Representation Statistics

Political Representation	Female	Percentage of Seats
2007	10	7.3%
2012	10	7.3%

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Senate elections were scheduled for the 13th June 2012 completing the current round of Presidential and Parliamentary elections. However, the 2012 Senate elections did not take place.

There was an 'information blackout' with regards to the senate elections. In the days immediately before and after the scheduled elections, there was very limited information on the details of the election and whether it was actually going to take place or if it had been cancelled.

In DRC, women were actively involved and stood in the 2006 general elections, and made up the majority of voters. However, very few of them managed to get elected: 8% at the National Assembly and 8.6% in the Senate.

The anti-democratic and conservative nature of political systems and social and religious institutions in DRC hinder the effective implementation of parity, despite being protected under the constitution. There is no definitive date for the rescheduled elections in 2013.

EGYPT

"By putting myself forward I am making this democratic right – the right of a woman to be president – a concrete reality, and that alters expectations" - BOTHAINA KAMEL³⁴

Egyptians voted in their presidential elections on May 23rd 2012, where voters had to choose between the nine male candidates. Bothaina Kamel, a pro-democracy activist, attempted to run as the only female candidate for the position as the nation's first elected Head of State since the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak last year, but she did not receive enough signatures to enter her name on the final ballot.



Bothaina Kamel Photograph: Reuters

Commenting on her presidential run, Bothaina Kamel said: "It doesn't matter to Egyptians whether someone is a woman or a man, what's important is whether it's someone who can understand and help them. The revolution has made Egyptians feel free, and that's why I'm running for president." She argued that with the dominance of religious conservatives, women's rights were under increasing attack since the revolution that swept through Egypt and the Arab world last year: "Egyptian women have slept outside in the cold, they have faced the bullets, lost a son, a brother or a husband, and they even died. But at the end, they were expelled from the constitutional reforms. Among the Members of Parliament only 2% are women... In this same Parliament, the Islamists are trying to lower the age of marriage to 12 so that these young girls can be married to some Gulf Countries dignitaries!"³⁵

While Kamel was unable to pursue the run for the presidential seat, she promised to continue her pro-democracy activism. "I will pursue my political actions... Egypt needs more than an Arab Spring. The country needs an earthquake."³⁶

Women in Egypt did not significantly lean towards any of the remaining candidates. However many women remained committed to being represented. Egypt's liberal Free Egyptians Party (FEP) declared its support for organizations promoting women's rights and anti-harassment laws. It has been reported that two-thirds of Egyptian women experience daily sexual harassment.³⁷

The Head of the National Council for Women (NCW) Mervat al-Talawi declared that whoever the President is, she would ask him to appoint a woman as his Vice President. Talawi said "the success of people is usually measured by the vital role played by the woman in development and her active role in the society."³⁸

Nehad Abul Qomsan, head of the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights stated that today Egyptian women are "more aware, stronger and more involved – like all Egyptians they are no longer afraid to raise their voices. But on a policy makers' level, it's different – the revolution is an orphan, it's blind, there is no vision or leadership on women's rights."³⁹

The shifts towards greater liberal reforms for women's rights are now largely ignored by the military political factions and directly opposed by religious groups.⁴⁰ This threatens many of the victories Egyptian women have won; but underlines the role to be played by the women's movement for religious reform.

The two remaining candidates faced off in the Presidential election on June 16th and 17th: Mohammed Morsi of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood party, and Ahmed Shafiq, who served as air-force commander under ousted president Mubarak. Both of these candidates were representative of the more conservative sides across the central divide in Egyptian politics – between military and religious leadership.

At the end of May 2012 around 2,000 protesters had gathered in Cairo's central Tahrir Square to protest Shafiq's presence on the run-off ballot, seeing him as far too connected to the ousted Mubarak and leaving Egypt polarized between autocracy or a religious state.⁴¹

Although Morsi had criticized Shafiq's policies towards women, Christians and other marginalized groups, in the run-up elections it was Amr Moussa who had most support among liberal feminists. He had no link to the Muslim Brotherhood, and although he was a former foreign minister under Mubarak, he did not have strong links to the old establishment in the way Morsi did. He represented the most apparently liberal agenda.⁴²

For the religious feminists, Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh represented a moderate religious approach, in contrast to the more conservative Morsi, and may still offer a means to seek reform and women's empowerment through engagement with the Muslim Brotherhood.

The authority of Egypt's Parliament, as an effective check on the power of the next president, with its small majority of the Democratic Alliance offered the next platform for political contestation.⁴³ However the representation of women is among the poorest in the world – with only **10 of 508 seats** (<2%) in the People's Assembly and **5 of 180 seats** (<3%) in the Shura Council (Upper House).⁴⁴ In the face of these obstacles to direct political power, many feminists are looking to movement building, women's empowerment and grassroots activity.

COMPLETING A REVOLUTION: WHERE DO WOMEN STAND?

Egyptian women have faced changing economic, political and social conditions. Occasional and incomplete economic reforms have done little for the advancement of women's stake in public and economic life, as subsidies have been withdrawn, wages have fallen, and social welfare has shifted from a national responsibility to that of families and local and religious communities.⁴⁵ With neither of the final presidential candidates outwardly supporting women's issues in Egypt, women potentially faced a zero-sum game.

Achieving more for women out of Egypt's revolution will require an alliance among male and female voters, politicians and bureaucrats who served the regime and who did not, the middle class, religious sects and labour activists.⁴⁶

2ND RUNOFF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND WHAT IT MEANT FOR WOMEN

The run-off for the Egyptian presidency took place on 16th and 17th June 2012 and was won by Mohamed Morsi of The Muslim Brotherhood.

A pattern has emerged in Egypt's history of political upheaval: the central role and sacrifice of women in the overthrow of the old regime followed by an abrupt re-institutionalization of male power. Women who had organized and fought for changes from the streets have persistently been met by the male dominated bureaucratic and political strongholds.

Hilary Clinton, one of the founders of [Vital Voices](#) and former U.S. Secretary of State, said "one of the important indicators as to how the whole process of democratization, political reform, economic reform is going is the way that the newly formed governments and their allies in the various countries treat women."⁴⁷

With the ascendance of conservative values, a democratizing Egypt and the rise to power of the Brotherhood at the top end of Egypt's new democracy, MEWC is concerned that women's influence is being cordoned into local and marginal political movements.

WOMEN MOVE FORWARD DESPITE BEING LEFT BEHIND

Women were at the forefront of the revolution and after the fall of Mubarak, women's groups immediately lobbied and worked to get women in the assembly to write a new constitution. Women's groups submitted names of women for election committees. In the end only 7% (7 members) of assembly seats were held by women, 3 of which are candidates of the socially conservative Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁸ While this was not a worst case scenario, it was a misleading and disappointing reflection of the centrality of women to the revolution.

Under the Mubarak regime, there was a 64-seat quota for women in the, albeit weak, parliament. When the Armed Forces took over, the quota was overturned and a new constitution was formed without women's input.⁴⁹ Still, Rina El Masry, an Egyptian business woman, is optimistic: "I believe the ceding of power to Egypt's interim military government was a step in the right direction for women's rights despite the number of female parliamentarians dropping to the current two percent... All democracies evolve."⁵⁰

However, according to Marianne Nagui Hanna Ibrahim, while the revolution has certainly created an opening for Egypt's democracy, "When it comes to women, it has failed. The biggest powers in the country at the moment are the military and the Muslim Brotherhood and both exclude women by default...But the revolution has also changed the situation. You can see it in the young women. We are more persistent in claiming our rights. More women are talking about sexual harassment than before. We are open about it and we are clear about our demands. The social change that is taking place – it's gradual but it's still there."⁵¹

"[Mozn Hassan](#), director of Nazra for Feminist Studies, a Cairo-based research organization, told CNN: "For years, Mubarak's regime was torturing women, harassing women, detaining mothers and daughters and wives of prisoners to put pressure on them. For sure it's the culture of the SCAF."⁵² Even after the revolution, on June 8th a mob of hundreds of men attacked female protestors in Tahrir Square who were calling for an end to sexual violence and harassment in Egypt. Victims have said this was an organized attempt to prevent women from participating in pro-democracy movements.⁵³

Women's Political Representation Statistics⁵⁴

Political Representation	2010	2012
Presidential Candidates	N/A	0/13
Female Parliamentary candidates	380/5181	376
Female members of parliament	65 (12.70%)	10/508 (1.97%)

THE GAMBIA

The 2012 legislative elections took place in The Gambia on March 29nd. At stake were 48 seats in the National Assembly. In Gambia's National Assembly, 48 members are elected by plurality vote in single-member constituencies to serve 5-year terms and 5 members are appointed by the president to serve 5-year terms for a team totalling 53.

The main parties participating in this election were the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC), whose leader, Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh is the current chief of state and head of government. The APRC won 43 votes and the National Reconciliation Party won one seat and four seats went to independents.⁵⁵ The United Front won zero seats in this election.

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN GAMBIA

Women in Gambia are under-represented in the top hierarchy of decision-making positions. Key factors that hinder women's advancement and leadership can be identified as low levels of education and training, socio-cultural factors and poverty. The human rights of women are abused, as violence against women in Gambia is widespread. Thousands of women and girls experienced some form of sexual abuse, trafficking or early and forced marriage.⁵⁶

Women constitute 51% of the population and the current fertility rate is at 6.1. Most women live in rural areas and are engaged in agricultural production, food processing and marketing and are commonly the main producers of food. Despite their huge investments in food production, women constitute 70% of the unskilled agricultural labour force. Land in the rural areas is scarce due to factors like environmental degradation as well as women facing barriers to owning land.

Due to a 50% illiteracy rate in the Gambia, the method for voting involves dropping a marble into a box that rings a bell as the marble drops in order to prevent voter fraud through multiple voting. Six opposition parties boycotted the elections saying that the APRC had an unfair advantage, criticizing how the APRC used their ruling status to use the government and the military to tilt elections in their favour.⁵⁷ 25 ruling APRC candidates ran unopposed and were automatically admitted to the assembly.⁵⁸

Women hold very few positions in the public sphere of decision-making. In the civil service they are 21% of the work force of which the majority are employed as administrative and support staff rather than in managerial positions.⁵⁹ However, women do constitute 58% of voters and they exercise their franchise during elections. Female representation in the National Assembly is 13% and falls far below that recommended by the Inter Parliamentary Union and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

DEFYING THE ODDS

Up until 2011, five women have held the position of Speaker or Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. As of December 2011, only 7.5% of the Gambian National Assembly is female, representing four women out of fifty-three members of the Assembly of which one is the Deputy Speaker.

All Africa reported that Bintanding Jarju of Foni Brefett was the only female candidate to run in this year's legislative election. Jarju said if elected, for which she was optimistic, she would make Foni "second to none" depending on the availability of resources. Jarjue insisted that she intended to influence donors, NGOs and government to bring projects to the "doorsteps of her people."⁶⁰

"I struggle to come up in the 1st place as a female candidate only to serve as a role model for the female candidate to come up. It is unfortunate that the females are lagging behind and I will do all I can to encourage them and convince them before I retire", she remarked.⁶¹

CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES THERE IS THAT STYLE ISSUE AGAIN. THE TEXT SWITCHES FROM FACTUAL TO REPORTING

Evidence from political party representations highlights gender bias and unequal gender representation. The current system does not meet the 30% quota system for female representatives. The selection processes in political parties creates obstacles to women seeking Parliamentary seats, and although women were strong mobilizers for their parties they were not selected as candidates for their party's campaigns.

Six opposition parties in the Gambia decided not to put up candidates for the 2012 National Assembly elections. Local newspapers suggested that this was because of the unlevel playing fields and the manifestation of public support for the ruling party amongst officials of government institutions that are supposed to be neutral. Only one opposition party stood for election but there were no female candidates. No woman from the other opposition parties came out to compete for the 2012 legislative election, but there was one female independent candidate.⁶² The 2012 National Assembly election as a result had only four elected women running in non-opposition positions.

Women's Political Representation Statistics

Political Participation	2011	2012
Female Parliamentary Candidates	N/A	Four women candidates, one independent, two representing the APRC and the NRP respectively, none from the opposition party.

GHANA

Ghanaians went to the polls on 7th December 2012 to vote in presidential and parliamentary elections. Several foreign and international organisations including the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) observed the elections to ensure that they were carried out in a democratic manner. Ghana has long been considered a model country in Africa since the end of military rule in 1992. About 13 million Ghanaians were registered to vote in the election, which for the first time used a biometric system to confirm voters' identities.⁶³

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: NO FEMALE CANDIDATES

The president is elected for a four-year term using a two-round system. There were 8 candidates contesting the president's seat, none of who were women.

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN GHANA

While there were no women who ran for the presidential seat this year, previously, two women, the former first lady Nana Konadou Agyemang Rawlings of the National Democratic Party (NDP) and Madam Akua Donkor of the Ghana Freedom Party (GFP) had stood for presidential candidates, although they were not selected. This was the first time in the history of Ghana that there had been a female leader of a political party standing for the presidency. Three parties fielded female Vice-Presidents: Convention People's Party(CPP)-Madam Cherita Sapong; the People's National Convention (PNC)-Madam Helen Sanorita Dzatugbe Matrevi; and the Patriotic People's Party (PPP)-Madam Eva Lokko.⁶⁴ This indicates that Ghana is promoting women participating in the highest levels of governance and public office.

Economic empowerment, availability of resources, and volunteers to run effective campaigns in a timely manner are some of the missing elements for women to become viable candidates. Politics are monetized in Ghana and women are portrayed negatively especially in the media.

Nevertheless, over the past 20 years progress has been made in the area of women in decision-making roles in Ghana. Women occupy key positions such as Speaker of Parliament, Attorney General and Ministers of states. The Ghanaian Constitution has a provision criminalizing discrimination on the basis of gender and also provides for the need to ensure regional and gender balance in representation in public decision making positions.⁶⁵ Yet is not fully implemented and mainstreamed into government practice.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS: WOMEN TAKE A STAND

Ghana has a unicameral parliament. A simple majority in single seat constituencies elects members.

In the 2012 elections on December 7th, there were only 133 women out of a total of 1332 parliamentary candidates for the 275 available seats. This was a 30% increase in numbers however, from 103 in 2008 to 133 in 2012 and although low overall, it was the highest number of women to have contested parliamentary seats in Ghana's political history.

Although viewed as a pillar of democracy in Africa, Ghana lags behind countries like Rwanda (with 56.25% in its Chamber of Deputies),⁶⁶ and Uganda (with 34.97% members of Parliament) for women in Parliament.⁶⁷ These are countries that have spearheaded affirmative action and increased the numbers of women in political participation both at the lower levels and higher levels of government. It's against this back drop that affirmative action would play a key role in increasing women's political participation in Ghana. Quotas, gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting and party-list systems which allow women to bid for seats in the legislature and executive branch would enhance women's opportunity to be represented in the government.

Ghana is a signatory to several international and regional frameworks that seek to increase and promote the role of women in governance. These include CEDAW, the Beijing Platform of Action, and the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality, The Maputo Protocol, and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality. Ghana has ratified all of these treaties without reservation and as such needs to achieve gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women. As Ghana continues on its path as a leader in democratic reform in Africa, its achievements are reinforced by progress in women's political participation. Ghana has earned the title of one of Africa's most hopeful democracies, by making continued progress in closing the gender gap in governance and ensuring that women participate in decision-making at all levels.

Women's Political Representation Statistics

Political Representation	2008	2012
Women in Parliament	18/228 (7.9%)	133 Candidates, 29/274, (10.6%)
Number of Female Presidential Candidates	N/A	2 Presidential, 3 Vice Presidential Candidates

GUINEA BISSAU

Nearly 600,000 people were eligible to vote in the March 2012 election, which featured a crowded field of nine candidates including former president Kumba Yala, who was overthrown in a 2003 coup. The vote followed the death of president Bacai Sanha in January and came just two years after the late president's election in an emergency ballot after Joao Bernardo Vieira, his predecessor and the country's dominant political figure, was assassinated.⁶⁸

The first presidential run-off election failed to produce an outright winner; preliminary results show that Carlos Gomes Jr. captured the majority of the votes.⁶⁹ After a military coup, the leading candidates were arrested and the election was cancelled.⁷⁰

LEGAL STATUS OF WOMEN

The Constitution and legislation of Guinea-Bissau prohibit all forms of discrimination on the grounds of gender, race or religion. In practice, the government is not in a position to enforce the principle of non-discrimination, and violence and discrimination against women remain serious problems. Traditionally, women do most of the agricultural work, but in certain ethnic groups, they do not have access to land and are not able to own property.⁷¹

INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE?

Representatives of seven out of the nine presidential candidates signed the Political Declaration prepared by the Women’s Political Platform. The candidates agreed to push for gender equality and women’s human rights through the implementation of the National Policy on Gender Equality and Equity. This included the decentralization of the administration through municipal elections with women candidates; a strengthening of capacity building opportunities for women; and the enabling of access to credit.

This initiative by the Women’s Political Platform was part of a set of actions undertaken to enhance women’s participation during the presidential elections held in March. It should be noted that Adiato Djalo Nandigna, Guinea-Bissau’s acting Prime Minister during the March elections was a woman. She was the first female to hold this position in the country’s history and was appointed by her predecessor earlier in 2012 to serve as interim during the elections process. Unfortunately no female candidates participated in the presidential race in 2012. Instead the competition involved nine male candidates.⁷²

Foreign observers said the election appeared to be free and fair and the United Nations mission in the country praised the authorities for holding a peaceful poll.

Decided on May 15, the second round of the 2012 presidential elections scheduled for 29th April have been postponed due to the coup. Elections may be held in 2013 but no date has been set.⁷³ Guinea-Bissau is no stranger to coups with no democratically elected leader ever having completed a term in office since independence was won by the military from Portugal in 1974.

Of the nine presidential candidates, none were women. In a country in which military coups are commonplace, women’s increased political participation is a serious challenge. The situation on the ground is increasingly difficult for citizens, as they have to deal with the instability that the military coup has brought.

Women’s Political Representation Statistics

Political Representation	2008	2012
Peoples National Assembly	14/100, 14%	N/A
Number of Women Candidates	N/A	0

LESOTHO

With a population of over 1.9 million, 916,230 people were registered to vote in the 2012 parliamentary elections held on May 26th.⁷⁴ Lesotho has a bicameral Parliament, with a National Assembly and a Senate. The National Assembly elections, originally scheduled for February, took place on May 26th, 2012 the 7th National Assembly Elections since independence.

A new party, the Democratic Congress (DC) was formed when a power struggle emerged within the Lesotho Congress for Democracy and Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili made a decision to break away and create his own party.⁷⁵ It was announced on the 29th May that the newly formed Democratic Congress had gained the majority of the constituency seats, but did not gain a majority of the seats when the second round of seats were calculated on proportional representation.⁷⁶ With these results, Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili resigned. As of May 31st, five opposition parties formed a coalition and a new Prime Minister was sworn in.⁷⁷ On June 8, 2012 Thomas Thabane succeeded Pakalitha Mosisili as the Prime Minister, not by winning elections, but by building a coalition government with the support of the opposition.⁷⁸

LESOTHO'S GENDER QUOTA

Lesotho uses two models in its politics: Proportional Representation model (PR) which is used as a means to promote gender parity in politics and the First-Past-The Post (FPTT) model. The National Assembly Electoral Act, 2011 requires that all political parties contesting Proportional Representation (PR) elections had to submit 'zebra party lists' to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). Section 47(2)(b) states that political parties shall arrange the candidates in order of preference from top to bottom, with a female or male candidate immediately followed by a candidate of the opposite sex; and (c) include equal numbers of women and men.⁷⁹

Lesotho has a dual legal system comprised of both customary and common law. According to the Constitution of Lesotho, women are equal to men. Section 30 of the National Assembly Act of 2011 mandates political parties registered with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to facilitate the full participation of women. However, in practice women are often at a disadvantage due to customary laws.

Lesotho is a highly patriarchal society and women are often only allowed to participate in different sectors of society, and politics in particular, if the prominent male in their household allows it.⁸⁰ In fact, when gender parity laws were mandated in local government for the first time in 2005, men from all over the country boycotted the elections. Furthermore, a rural farmer claiming that his rights were being denied challenged the quota in the High Court.⁸¹ The farmer, Molefi Tsepe, lost the appeal when the High Court dismissed his appeal and upheld the gender quotas.

At least 18 political parties participated in the May 2012 elections. A total of 237 (22.7%) women against 807 men contested the elections. Of those women candidates, 13 (16.3%) won in the FPTT system while another 18 women (45%) got into parliament through PR.⁸² This is an indication that there was a slight increase of women in parliament in 2012 compared with the number of women after the 2007 National Assembly elections (27.5% and 25% respectively).⁸³ It is worth noting that men led all parties that contested.

INCLUSIVE GOVERNMENT?

Lesotho currently has no gender parity clause at a parliamentary level. The Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) has an internal policy that aims to increase representation not only within their party, but in parliament as a whole.⁸⁴ Furthermore, the LCD has a self-initiated gender parity clause, which ensures that 30% of its members are women.⁸⁵ There is a branch of the LCD known as the Women's League that aims to promote women's rights and honour women who have broken barriers in the male dominated society. The party had enough power to make former Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili review inheritance law in relation to the girl child.⁸⁶

CONCLUSION

With the prospect of political uncertainty looming and past electoral violence, Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu brokered a pledge between the parties to maintain peace by respecting the election results.⁸⁷ The African Union, the Southern African Development Community, and the Commonwealth provided observer missions to ensure a fair election.⁸⁸ Overall, the elections seemed free and fair with minimal violence. However, Lesotho has still not achieved gender equality especially at the highest level of governance. In comparison to other countries, Lesotho is making greater strides, however it is clear that more investment needs to be made towards women's political participation.

Women Political Representation Statistics

Political Representation	National Assembly Elections 2007	National Assembly Elections 2012
Female parliamentary Candidates	N/A	237/807(22.7%)
Females Securing national Assembly seats	28/119 (23.5%)	32/120 (26.67%)
Female Senators	N/A	9/24 (27.2%)
Female Cabinet Ministers	N/A	5/18 (21.7%)
Female Assistant Ministers	N/A	3 /4 (42.8%)

LIBYA

The 2012 election was Libya's first national poll after four decades of dictatorship under Muammar Gaddafi. The Libyan Public National Conference elections were held on July 8th 2012 to establish a transitional government. Once elected the Conference was responsible for the appointment of a Prime Minister, Cabinet and a Constituent Authority, which was tasked with drafting a new constitution. The Libyan Public National Conference was also responsible for ensuring that a general election is held in 2013 to elect a new government.



UN Photo/Iason Athanasiadis

Women sing the Libyan national anthem during an UN-sponsored event designed to encourage female candidates to participate more fully in the country's first free elections in nearly half a century.

STATUS AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

Throughout Qaddafi's rule from 1969 to 2011, only 4 women occupied ministerial posts, in the Ministry of Culture, Media, Social Affairs and Women.

During the period of transitional government that followed the fall of the Gaddafi's regime, the National Transitional Council (NTC) included one woman, Dr. Salwa Fawzi El-In, to represent and lead the department of Legal Affairs and Women. In November 2011, the NTC announced a new cabinet of 28 members; Fatima Hamroush was nominated as Minister of Health and Mabrouka Sherif as Minister of Social Affairs.

THE IMPACT OF A NEW ELECTORAL LAW

An early draft electoral law published and approved on January 1st, 2012 guaranteed that 10% of the 200 MPs elected would be women, unless fewer candidates ran.⁸⁹ Unfortunately the second draft abolished the quota for women and allowed local NTC council members to run in the election. It also changed the electoral system from being countrywide to constituency-based.

Regardless of the protests by the Libyan Women's Peace Platform and a national petition, the National Transitional Council has justified their decision by claiming that the reformed electoral system, known as the zipper system, is in effect ensuring women's quota by alternating party lists. A 'zipper quota' or a 'rank-order' rule is a provision requiring that a certain percentage of women are placed in certain positions on the party list, for example every other place goes to a woman.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL CONFERENCE ELECTIONS JULY 7, 2012

In the July elections, 540 female candidates compared to 662 male candidates competed for the 80 seats reserved for political parties. For the 120 seats reserved for individuals in the assembly, only 85 (3.4%) of the 2,500 candidates were women.⁹⁰

30 women secured seats in the national conference partially as a result of the zebra system that obliged parties to alternate on their lists between male and female candidates, and the international and national effort to support the political participation of women in Libya. Only one female independent candidate was elected. In all women hold approximately 16.5% of the 200 seats.

Women's Political Representation Statistics

Political Representation	2009	2012
Women in Parliament	5/65 (7.7%)	33/200 (16.5%)

MALI

The Malian Presidential elections were delayed after a coup d'état took place on March 21st 2012. Women have played a remarkable role in Malian politics with a small number of women holding Ministerial posts and seats in the National Assembly. Aminata Dramane Traoré, author and political activist served as the Minister of Culture and Tourism of Mali, coordinator of the United Nations Development Programme, and board member of the International Press Service.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN MALI

Women represent 52% of rural population in Mali, with between 64.2%-80% living below the poverty line (EDS III 2001). As a group, women are particularly disadvantaged. 71.7% of women aged 15 to 49 years have had limited to no access to education.

Women also have limited access to decision-making bodies. There were 14 women MPs out of 147 men in the National Assembly. In 2002, there were 4 women Ministers of a Government of 28 members. Further challenges to women's political participation include a gender biased legal framework that discriminates against women's human rights.

POSTPONED ELECTIONS & THE IMPACT ON WOMEN

Sidibé Aminata Diallo, a professor at the University of Bamako and the leader of the Movement for Environmental Education and Sustainable Development political party became the first woman to stand for President of Mali as one of eight candidates in the April 2007 presidential election. Diallo received over 12,000 (55%) votes in the election. The elections scheduled to take place in 2012, were abruptly postponed following the coup d'état led by the military on the 21st of March 2012.

The loss of the northern half of the country to armed factions shortly after the coup plunged Mali into crisis in which the use of violence goes beyond the battlefield, with a marked increase in gender-based violence reported.

"As unrest continues in northern Mali, an alarming number of acts of sexual violence have been reported," the U.N.'s special representative on sexual violence in conflict, Margot Wallstrom, said. "Allegations include abductions, public rapes and subjecting women and girls to acts of sexual violence in front of family members"⁹¹. The outcome of the recent international intervention led by French President Francois Hollande is still unclear.

To break the cycle of violence and discrimination against women it is vital to change these attitudes both within formal government and within society and both on the part of men and among women themselves.⁹² Without a voice in decision-making, and access to the institutions, which shape social norms and attitudes, women will continue to be marginalized. At this critical turning point in Mali's democratic transition, it is important to ensure that women are not only interpreted as victims of the conflict but have the opportunity to take part in peace

making; as their participation is important for the reconstruction of trust between citizens and the state.

Local initiatives to ensure the representation of women in the peace making process include a declaration submitted by a coalition of women's organizations and associations (AFLP, AFIP, WANEP, RESFECO, WILDAF Mali, ASAPSE, CAFO, Représentante des Femmes déplacées de Tombouctou, Femmes leaders de Kidal, CAFO de Bourem, Association des femmes de camp, Association des juristes du Mali, AMERJF, APDF, Association des jeunes policières du Mali, AMDH), which references the need to encourage women's participation in the crisis negotiation process.⁹³

SENEGAL

*"Feminine leadership is really important for democracy, for development and for peace,"
Prof. Amsatou Sow Sidibe*

The Senegalese presidential elections took place on February 26, 2012 and the parliamentary elections took place on July 1, 2012. "Voters in Senegal went to the polls to elect 150 parliamentarians, 90 through direct suffrage while 60 would be chosen from national party lists. About 5 million of the West African nation's 13 million population were eligible to vote."⁹⁴ During the first vote for presidential candidates, there were two female candidates, however neither candidate made it to the second round voting. This is a big hurdle for Senegal's young democracy; even though they both lost in the first round of voting, Senegal's two female presidential candidates set a very important precedent for Senegalese women in the public arena

ABOUT THE TWO WOMEN CANDIDATES

Amsatou Sow Sidibé (59), holds a doctorate in law and political science from the Université Paris II. She has a long history of human rights as a lawyer and in her work as the Director of Studies at the Peace and Human Rights Institute at the Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar. As the director, she was invited to participate in a roundtable discussion with President Bill Clinton and Hilary Clinton on the topic of human rights in West Africa.⁹⁵ 15 years ago, Ms. Sidibe co-founded the African Network for the Promotion of Women Workers with regional branches throughout West Africa giving women job training and legal education. She has published numerous works and papers on human rights and she was one of the 1000 women proposed for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005.

Dieng Douma Diakhate (65), has been heralded as one of the greatest fashion designers in Africa. Her good reputation in this business is such that she has become unquestionably the preferred designer of Heads of State and other African first ladies. Describing her nomination and success, Ms. Diakhate said "they've chosen me because they think I am an agent of change and I am going to change my country's political landscape."⁹⁶ She argued that she is speaking on behalf of Senegal's downtrodden and unemployed and that more than anyone else, she represents change.

THE 2010 GENDER QUOTA LAW IN PRACTICE DURING THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

A record number of women were elected to Senegal's parliament this year. Sixty-four women now have seats in the country's 150-member National Assembly, thanks to a law on gender parity.⁹⁷ There were 13 candidates who ran for president of which two were women.

Senegal's electoral law was amended in 2010, to be replaced with an improved electoral legislation which obligated that "all candidate lists for legislative, regional, municipal and rural elections be comprised of an equal number of male and female candidates, presented on the list in an alternating manner, for lists submitted under the PR system."⁹⁸ The reformed electoral law was applied for the first time during the 2012 parliamentary elections. The law, which was welcomed and praised by women's groups and associations, has been credited with doubling the representation of women in the national assembly.

Gender parity, according to Fatou Sow Sarr, Director of a gender institute at the University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar "will bring our country in line with more modern nations and democratic governance."⁹⁹ Democracy is not

a true democracy unless both women and men have an equal role to play.

Ms. Diakhate claimed she had been selected as a presidential candidate, "because they think I am an agent of change and I am going to change my country's political landscape."¹⁰⁰

CHALLENGES IN THE FACE OF NEW LAWS

Of the outgoing law-makers in the 2012 election 34 were women, holding 23% of the seats.¹⁰¹ While the international community has praised Senegal for this gender parity law, some conservative groups in Senegal have fiercely argued against it: "Women are being chosen because they are women and not by merit. All the parties have had trouble drawing up their lists. There are not a lot of educated women on the ground," said religious leader and lawmaker Maye Niang.¹⁰²

Laurence Gavron, a Jewish female politician originating from France but who became a naturalized Senegalese citizen several years ago ran for a seat in Parliament, said of the quota law: "This is something very good, particularly in Senegal, where much injustice is done to women" and "it's important to start there, in politics."¹⁰³ She admits that without the gender parity law, she is not sure she would have made it on her party's list.

MEWC is encouraged by the gender quota law, but we are anxious to see the final results and hoping the number of women politicians elected is greatly increased.

RESULTS (PARLIAMENTARY & PRESIDENTIAL)

The Senegalese opposition candidate Macky Sall defeated Abdoulaye Wade, the incumbent president who sought a third term in office despite international calls for the end of his tenure. Both female candidates who ran did not make it to the second round of voting.

Provisional results issued by the National Commission of Votes on July 10th after the Parliamentary elections revealed that female candidates held 64 of the seats in the national assembly, making up 42.67% of deputies elected in parliamentary elections.¹⁰⁴

Women's Political Representation Statistics

Political Participation	2007	2012
Women in National Assembly	34/150 (22.7%)	64/150(42.67 %)
Number of women candidates	N/A	N/A
Presidential	N/A	2 candidates, 0 winners

SIERRA LEONE

The third general election, since Sierra Leone's long civil war ended in 2002, took place on the 17th of November 2012, and was a relatively calm affair. Citizens could vote for their President, 112 parliamentary seats and 456 local council seats.

The presidency can only be won with at least 55% of the vote.¹⁰⁵ The two leading contenders were: the current President, Ernest Bai Koromo of the All People's Congress (APC), and Julius Maada Bio of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). Although there were no female presidential candidates, the country saw its first female vice-presidential candidate, Kadi Sesay from the opposition SLPP.

There were very few women running in the parliamentary races: of 586 candidates competing for 112 parliamentary seats, just 38 were women. In addition to this disappointing number of female parliamentary candidates, there were only 337 women, out of 1,283 candidates, who ran in local council elections.¹⁰⁶

Ten years since the civil war, this election was key to prove Sierra Leone's intent to stabilize its fragile democracy and voters seemed keen to vote for progress: "I've got to be here to put things right. To put things right here, we have to vote for the right person in the right place and I've got to be a part of that," said a voter who gave her name as Fona.¹⁰⁷

Reports of the relatively peaceful nature of the election were good news considering the country's long history of election-related violence. According to VOA: "Civil society groups set up a 'Citizen's Situation Room' to monitor the voting environment in real time via text messages from 9,493 observers, one for each polling station."¹⁰⁸ Election officials must reveal a winner within ten days of the polling. If no candidate wins at least 55% a runoff election is required. There were concerns of scenarios of close results leading to violent disputes over results. Concerns over outcries from unofficial partial results released by the media or political parties could have led to a break in the peaceful election. However, runoff elections were unnecessary as a week after the polls closed, Sierra Leone's incumbent president, President Ernest Bai Koroma, was announced the winner.

FEMALE VOTERS DECIDE

Sierra Leoneans chose between keeping an incumbent president who has expanded health care and paved roads and electing an opposition candidate who is a former military general to lead this war-scarred nation still recovering a decade later. It was a close election, with some people eager to re-elect a president who championed education and healthcare while others leaned towards the opposition party in hopes of improving the economy. Women seemed to be split, supporting both candidates. The incumbent has made important progress for women's health while the opposing candidate has a female running mate for vice president. Regardless, women's turnout proved to be crucial: "At a maternity clinic across the street from one downtown polling station, nurses were voting in shifts." said midwife Kiptieu Tarawalai, adding that under Koroma's plan the women who come to her clinic only pay for their food and clothing."¹⁰⁹

PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS: WOMEN CANDIDATES FEW AND FAR BETWEEN

The previous parliamentary election in 2007 produced just 17 women out of the 124 parliamentarians, while only 18.9% of councillors in the local government were female, none at the level, comprising less than 10% of all top civil service positions.

According to Barabara Bagura, the director of the women's organization Grassroots Empowerment for Self-Reliance, the blame for such low numbers of female candidates belongs to the current group of female lawmakers. She blames them for failing to pass the Gender Equality Bill that would have provided for a 30 percent representation of women in the legislature. Bangura argues that the women's parliamentary caucus did not succeed due to a lack of interest on their part to fight for women's rights. "We had to be hard on their heels, they did not show enough interest in pushing the bill forward and also getting their parties to support it. Now many of them are not going back to parliament, as they have not retained their seats. I hope they have learned their lesson," Bangura told IPS.¹¹⁰ However, female parliamentarians also argued that part of the problem was that there was controversy over which arm of the government would monitor the implementation of the Gender Equality Bill, debates which took away time from convincing their parties to vote for the bill.

The Human Rights Commission Sierra Leone (HRCSL) has argued that the Gender Equality Bill would have greatly benefit the country's development. "There is a whole raft of women with the appropriate skills and experience to

take on leadership roles, and the confidence to do so. But because of a bad system these women have been deliberately marginalized.”¹¹¹

However, several female parliamentary candidates voiced concerns of intimidation by male counterparts. Navo Kai-Kai from the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) told IPS that “there was serious intimidation; my male opponent came out with his secret societies during our party primaries so I had to leave my district in Kailahun, east of the country, escorted by the police to Kenema district, for fear of my life. As a result I was unable to contest for the party symbols and lost to my male opponent.”¹¹²

Another issue preventing women from running for a seat is the prohibitive cost to get a name on a ballot. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) recently increased the nomination fees from 100,00 Leones (\$25) to one million Leones (\$205), a huge leap in cost. Not only is it difficult for some candidates to pay the fee as individuals, but also it is particularly difficult for women who have to convince their parties to pay their fee *and* nominate a woman as their party’s representative. After significant protest, the government agreed to help candidates pay the fees.¹¹³

Even so, Bangura places the blame on female parliamentarians themselves: “I always say that women do not know the power they have; we always say to them you are a woman first before you belong to a political party. Not all of them with party symbols will win. So whilst we are looking at the women that actually have symbols we have to look at the ones that will go through, that will win seats in parliament and council, we will definitely see decreased figures.”¹¹⁴

An organization called the Women’s Situation Room in Freetown, Sierra Leone led an innovative monitoring exercise during the elections. The centre in Freetown allowed voters and observers to call in and log issues of concern relating to incidents of violence at the poll sites. The centre would then transmit reports to the National Electoral Commission and to the police. They managed to be an important resource for women during the elections, as well as raise awareness of important gender issues.¹¹⁵



Sesay Kadi, first female vice-presidential candidate in Sierra Leone, 2012; IRIN News

Women's Political Representation Statistics

Political Representation	2007	2012
Female Parliamentarians	16/124 (12.9%)	15/121 (12.4%)
Councillors in Local Government	18.9%	N/A

SOMALIA

Social activist Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected as Somalia's new president on September 10th 2012. Mohamud had come second to the incumbent president, Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, in the first round of voting among Somalia's parliamentarians, but he then passed the 50% threshold in the second round, winning by 190 votes to 79.

ALLEGATIONS OF FRAUD

Senior diplomatic sources deployed in the region to ensure an honest and fair election, have confirmed that votes had been bought and sold over weeks leading up to the election. It is the first time since the 1991 overthrow of president Said Barre that a new leader has been chosen inside the country, a development hailed by the UN as a sign of improving security. However, the process has been tainted by allegations of bribery and corruption.¹¹⁶

While widespread instability in society can lead to positive and negative shifts in gender roles, the constraints on women's entry to politics and governance structures are often exacerbated during armed conflict. At the same time, gender equality is often not considered an urgent issue in the aftermath of war—a factor that has a lasting impact on women's ability to engage in the transitional process and long-term reconstruction and development.

Despite political, societal, cultural, economic, and psychological barriers, women are finding ways to participate in the political life of post-conflict societies in record numbers.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In 2004, after 13 years of civil war, the lengthy and complex Somali peace talks facilitated by the Nairobi-based Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) began to make headway. In January, an agreement was reached to select members of Parliament based on the traditional clan system.

Women activists, leaders and civil society associations have been highly involved in the political reform project, following a conference in Nairobi in 2000. In May 2000, women leaders decided to create their own clan to lobby for women's political participation. With the support of the NGO Save Somali Women and Children, UNIFEM, and other organizations, the 100 women tirelessly lobbied clan leaders, international representatives, and other Somali women to be recognized as a "sixth clan," a group of women united as women and not by tribal affiliation.¹¹⁷

In a recent interview Dr. Shukria Dini, who is the founder of the Somali Women's Studies Centre in Nairobi, Kenya, talked about how the breakdown of the Somali state has created a new space for women as actors for peace and security. However, she also pointed out that women are marginalised and that the patriarchal clan system, which is particularly powerful in Somalia, opposes women's involvement in decision-making. Hence, Dr.

Dini questioned the use of the clan system to promote women’s rights, saying: *“Why use a system that denies women participation to promote women’s rights? It will never work.”*¹¹⁸

BIG LEAPS FOR WOMEN

Due to the limited availability of data it is difficult to assess women’s participation in the elections that took place in September 2012. Women were only able to negotiate 16% representation in parliament as opposed to the proposed 30% gender quota.¹¹⁹

Others reported that only 15% of parliamentary seats were gained for women: “Sifting through the names of the 202 MPs released by the Technical Selection Committee...30 of the names are women, or approximately 15 per cent of the constitutionally mandated 30 per cent. This 15 per cent of women’s positions were achieved after weeks of haggling where male clan leaders were cajoled to include women in their nominations.”¹²⁰ Regardless of the failure to achieve the mandated 30% quota, MEWC considers this an important leap for women in Somalia.

Back in July 2003, delegates agreed to reserve 12% of seats for women in the National Assembly and 25% in regional assemblies and this remained in the final version of the Charter. A summary of women’s reaction at the time notes: “Although a 12 percent quota was not what the women delegates had hoped for, the women at the peace talks saw it as an important outcome of their participation in the talks since there could have been no reference at all to women’s participation in the documents. These gains are a starting point for longer-term advocacy efforts.”¹²¹

ONGOING CHALLENGES

Female literacy in Somalia is among the lowest in the world. Improving female literacy is an essential step towards addressing women’s political exclusion and their disempowerment by the various male dominated, male controlled judicial systems that operate in different parts of the country.¹²²

Women are still largely viewed as passive victims, not agents for change, and there is a lack of unity among different actors working for women’s empowerment. Civil Society Organisations (CSO’s) and parliamentarians work in isolation from each other and there is little agreement between CSO’s. Hence there is no collective agenda or policy. As a result of the lack of resources and funding, women’s rights organizations in Somalia are also competing with each other for funding.¹²³

OBSTACLES FOR FUTURE ELECTIONS

According to Cawo Abdi, a sociologist from the University of Minnesota, sectarian and power-seeking men as well as the clan system are preventing women from playing a vital role in Somalia’s politics. These men “utilise clan and religious politics” and “represent a threat for women and their prospects of political inclusion,” by perpetuating the norm that women belong in the private sphere, as are the nomadic clan customs.¹²⁴

Women’s Political Representation Statistics

Political Representation	2004	2012
Female Parliamentarians	37/546, (6.8%)	38/275, 13.8%

SOUTH SUDAN

On 9 July 2012, South Sudan marked its first anniversary of its declaration of independence in 2011 from Sudan. However, both internal and external strife and insecurity have challenged its first year and post-war stability has not yet been achieved in the young nation and many factors risk the country deteriorating further during this fragile time.¹²⁵ Disputes between South Sudan and Sudan continue. The sharing of profits from oil production and the disputed status of the Abyei region has mired South Sudan's early years of development. South Sudan is still in a state of humanitarian crisis as of January 2013, and it is getting worse according to the United Nations.¹²⁶

While South Sudan relies on oil for 98% of its government revenue,¹²⁷ disputes regarding the transportation and share of oil revenues with Sudan continue to linger and poison relationships between the two countries. Tensions mounted and conflict was close to resuming in April this year as talks to achieve an agreement had failed.

A referendum on the status of the Abyei region, which was scheduled to take place in July 2012, has now been postponed to an indefinite date. On 14 July, Presidents from Sudan and South Sudan met on the sidelines of the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa and announced their agreement to hold a referendum on the area.¹²⁸ However, both sides concede on the difficulty of defining voter eligibility¹²⁹ and no new date has yet been set. Later in October 2012, the African Union proposed to hold a referendum in October 2013 and though this has been accepted, it has received mixed reactions.¹³⁰

The situation of women in South Sudan has not changed drastically since independence. Women continue to face threats to their security, including sexual and domestic violence, early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), lack of access to health care services and high maternal mortality.¹³¹ In October 2012, South Sudan's only female governor discussed how women need to push for legislation to address gender issues in the country. She outlined her main goal to raise awareness among women, with the hope that they will not solely rely on information from their husbands but will get information through female leaders across the nation.¹³²

Literacy rate remains extremely low. Only (16%) for women in South Sudan compared to 40% for men are literate. Lack of access to education and schooling due notably to early marriages, pregnancies and domestic trafficking, prevents them from participating actively in the economic and political life of their country. They lack representation in decision-making positions and, although enshrined in the constitution, traditional cultural practices, continue to discriminate against women, notably in terms of the inheritance of land and access to education. In 2011 88 women were elected to the 332 seat parliament, constituting 26.5% of the chamber.



UN Photo/Tim McKulka

Woman in Juba, Sudan, Votes in Extended Elections

Women's Political Representation Statistics

Political Representation	2011
Female Parliamentarians	88/332, 26.5%



UN Photo/Martine Perret Election officers begin the task of counting votes late into the night after the second round of presidential and provincial elections in Bunia – DRC

MEWC CONCLUSIONS

GENDER QUOTAS AND THEIR CHALLENGES

This year, many of the elections we monitored were implementing their gender quota laws for the first time. As an organization, Make Every Woman Count supports the use of gender quotas in order to ensure gender equity in political representation. We recognize, however, that there are several drawbacks to the use of gender quotas. Still, we believe that the values of equality and representation are a lynchpin to achieving women’s civil, political and sexual rights in the African continent. Yet, in the absence of political will, gender quotas can often be seen as a temporary fix and has even led to a stagnation or even decreases in the numbers of women elected.

Quotas are not the only factors that influence the level of women’s political participation; electoral systems are key. Gender sensitive electoral arrangements; access to and safety at polling stations; literacy; family laws; visibility of female candidates; knowledge of candidates and party choices are important. Some argue that quotas deny seats to more qualified candidates – but how else can women gain the experience and visibility needed to set the precedent of women in politics?

Quotas are only the first step. The partitioning of female politicians to ‘service and gender related’ ministerial and cabinet positions is another method for segregating women in politics. While we do feel it is incredibly important for there to be a gender advisory committee in every government, separating gender issues from offices for the economy, environment, health, labour, education, and defence is to totally misunderstand the role of gender in every aspect of society. Women must be represented at every level of government. To have a gender bureau is not enough.



UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran

staff members of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) march alongside Sudanese women for “16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence”

FINAL NOTE

This report has highlighted how the development of women's political participation in Africa is tied to a number of crosscutting factors. Gender equality and women's political participation are not only important indicators of inclusive peace building and good governance, but should be placed at the heart of post-conflict reconstruction programming and policy-making. Evidence shows how female participation significantly helps to increase the crucial culture of plurality in the post-conflict political process. Sustainable democratic development is incomplete and impossible without the full inclusion and integration of women in all aspects of a nation's culture and society.

With the publication of this report, MEWC hopes to provide means and encouragement for greater collaboration between women leaders, potential female electoral candidates, women's organisations, governments and international organisations. We are building a wide, active and robust network of services to further enable women to progress towards the goal of every woman's full and central participation in the political, economic and social development of African nations. We will continue to pursue this core goal by fulfilling our role as an accessible platform through which African women can exchange their ideas and achievements and where their voices and combined power can be brought to bear on the international stage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

- a) Governments should actively promote and encourage the candidacy of women candidates through the use of quotas that can be re-enforced through sanctions and adequate electoral systems and legal measures to emphasise women's rights.
- b) National Constitution and other national legal frameworks, specifically Family Law, must guarantee women equal rights to their male counterparts.
- c) States ought to make data, particularly the number of women in office/ parliament, higher and lower houses more easily accessible on official national websites, newspapers and other forms of media.
- d) States should encourage voting awareness campaigns prior to election to ensure voters men and women of all ages are aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- e) States must support education for all. Illiteracy continues to prevent many women from benefiting from their right to vote.

POLITICAL PARTIES

- a) Should promote men and women candidates equally.
- b) Should comply with parity quotas regardless of whether or not they are voluntary.
- c) Publish party lists with men and women candidates side by side.

INTERNATIONAL NGOS

- a) International Organisations should encourage national governments to record and publically publish such information to make it available to all. Apart from the IPU website, it remains difficult to acquire relevant and reliable data on women candidates running and the number of women candidates elected.
- b) Seek a grass root approach to support women political participation in Africa at all levels and cooperate with women's organisations on the ground to construct a sustainable, realistic, gradual solution.

c) Support women candidates and women's organisations throughout the political process.

LOCAL NGOS, WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS, ASSOCIATIONS AND MEMBERS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

a) Should encourage and support cooperation with each other to support women candidates, create and generate awareness amongst women voters to promote women's political participation.

b) Establish programmes to encourage women and the youth to participate in the political realm and vote.

c) Should record, report, publish and share their findings, projects and experience, addressing women's political participation at all levels.

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