



The Politics of Quotas in Tanzania

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The Profile of the Country

The United Republic of Tanzania includes the mainland (the former Tanganyika) and Zanzibar (made up of the islands of Pemba and Unguja). The country covers 945,085 square kilometres and is the largest state in East Africa, estimated to be twice the size of France. It borders Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda and Zambia. Although the majority of Tanzanians speaks Swahili, Tanzania is a multilingual country with approximately 120 ethnic groups with different dialects, customary practices, and value systems, which largely determine the position and status of women.¹

Tanzania is one of the world's poorest countries, with more than 50 percent of its population receiving an average income that is 16 percent below the national poverty line.² Approximately half of all Tanzanians live in poverty and 36 percent live in absolute poverty. Some 59 percent of the rural population is poor (10.9 million people). About 85 percent of all poor Tanzanians are to be found in rural areas, accounting for about 90 percent of absolute poverty in the country. Around 39 percent of the urban population, including those residing in the capital, Dar-es-Salaam, is poor. The urban population is growing rapidly, at a rate of 6.8 percent per year, the fourth highest in Eastern and Southern Africa. The poor spend at least 75 percent of their minimal income on food, which is of low nutritional value (less than 2,100 calories per person). The poor spend only two percent of their income on healthcare and 0.6 percent on education. It is estimated that 32 percent of the poor and 57 percent of the absolute poor have never received any kind of formal education. Women head more than 25 percent of Tanzanian households.³ Women shoulder a disproportionate

burden in regard to poverty due to existing customary laws and practices, which deny them access to property and credit facilities.

The Political System

Tanzania is a country that is in transition from a monolithic political system to a pluralist political system. In May 1992, the Eighth Constitutional Amendment (Act 4 of 1992) removed the one-party system of government and provided for multi-party elections for the Union Government. Further amendments provided for multi-party elections for local government and redefined new rules of states of emergence. The composition of the multi-party parliament was also redefined (all candidates elected except the Attorney General) with qualified women nominated to fill 15 percent of the number of constituencies (to represent parties in proportion to the numbers of seats won), and five Zanzibaris nominated by the Zanzibari House. Additionally, new rules for the National Electoral Commission (where commissioners are appointed by the president and with powers to create new constituencies, subject to the permission of the president) were established.

The Quota system (Special Seats)

In Tanzania, 'special' parliamentary seats for women were first introduced during the one-party era in order to increase female representation in the legislature. Women, though, were not the only group to be allocated special seats. Other groups that received them included the youth, the army and workers. The idea of special seats was to ensure that the voices of special categories of citizens were heard in parliament. The thrust was not to bring about balance, but to incorporate these voices, which otherwise would have been at a disadvantage in the 'normal' electoral process. These parliamentary representatives were known as national members of parliament (MPs) who represented the national interest.

The national interest, however, was not clearly defined. In an interview conducted by this author in 1988 with a few female MPs who had taken this path, one stated emphatically that she is a "national MP" (*Mimi ni Mbunge wa Taifa na siyo Mbunge wa wanawake*), meaning, "I am a 'national member of parliament, not an MP for women'. When asked why it was necessary for them to enter parliament on the women's ticket, she said: 'women are practical; they deal with small details, which matter!' That is, women raise very practical questions in parliament because they do not forget small details like a shortage of cotton wool in hospitals or a shortage of sanitary towels in shops. Men are more interested in global issues. Hence there is a need to marry the two. Most female MPs who were interviewed during this period shared similar positions: they considered themselves to be 'national' MPs, and not MPs for women. But none could provide a clear definition of what constituted the national interest as opposed to 'constituency' interests. The screening of female MPs was conducted by the women's wing of the ruling party, Umoja wa Wanawake wa Tanzania (UWT), but the final vote lay with parliament. The first question with regard to this category of MPs is: whose interest are they representing? What is their constituency? Who are they accountable to?

The initial objective of these special seats for women and other groups was not to redress a historic imbalance, which had excluded them from parliament, but rather to 'add' more voices, to enhance the representation of varied interests under a one-party regime. Ironically, though, these voices were not even supposed to represent 'particularistic' interests, but,

instead, ‘national’ interests. Hence, there were no plans or strategies to level the playing field, so as to reflect the diverse interests that needed to be represented. Once an MP was elected through the special seats arrangement, they were not expected to associate themselves with the groups whose ticket they were using to gain entrance to parliament. They became national MPs without defined terms of reference as to what was expected from them.

“Special Seats” for Women and Representation of Women’s Interests

The introduction of special seats for women did not lead to an increased number of women in parliament. As a matter of fact, it might have impacted negatively on their chances of entering parliament via the normal constituency channel. The percentage of female MPs was already in decline. In the first parliament (1961–65), 7.5 percent of female members were elected in constituency elections. This fell to 3.5 percent during the 1970-75 parliamentary elections. In the 1985 elections, which were the first to test the quota, women suffered yet another setback in terms of constituency seats, where only two percent of female MPs won constituency seats in 1985, a decline of 5.5 percent compared to the general elections of 1961. In the elections in 1990, 1995 and 2000, the percentages were two, 2.9 and four respectively. From 1985 to 2000, therefore, 95 percent of female MPs entered the legislature via the special seats arrangement.

In 1997, a constitutional reform resulted in the quota for women being increased to 15 percent of special seats in parliament and 25 percent of seats on local councils. This is in addition to normal constituency representation elections. A constitutional amendment in 2000 resulted in the percentages of special seats being further increased to 20 percent in parliament and 33.3 percent on local councils. These constitutional commitments have not reached the 30 percent target set by the Beijing Platform for Action and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) for the national parliament. It is expected that the 30 percent target will be reached by 2005. However, there are no clearly articulated action plans to ensure that the country meets the target.

Some key questions emerging from the Tanzanian experience are listed below.

1. The question of representation: Who are these women representing?
2. Who decides on the type of candidates entering parliament via this method?
3. What strategies are in place to phase out the quota or preferential treatment?
4. How have political parties internationalized the quota system?
5. Is the quota system an effective way of promoting women’s access to positions of power and influence?
6. Are the processes for transforming political institutions exclusively based on male principles of politics? And who is leading them?

Whose interest is being Represented?

Despite the low number of women in parliament, women MPs have been able to push for laws that address women’s concerns in several areas. The first concerned maternity leave for both married and unmarried mothers – a Bill was tabled and defended by women MPs. Women MPs were also able to push for a revision of a law that demanded that high school leavers stay home for two years before attending university. This decision dramatically

affected the enrolment of women in tertiary level institutions. Parliament revised the bill to allow female candidates to enter university directly after high school. A sexual offence bill increasing the severity of the punishment of sexual offenders, was pushed in parliament by female MPs who had networked with women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Similarly, the land law reform incorporated a clause that declared unconstitutional customary practices that discriminated against women. But women MPs were not able to push for the total removal of customary laws from the statute books, even though most are based on discriminatory practices.

Merely Adding Women or Transforming the Patriarchal Political Culture?

Changing laws in favour of women is not sufficient to transform patriarchal political norms and values that continue to prevent women from accessing political resources. The issues of women impacting transformation of parliamentary patriarchy culture into a non-sexist institution has also been a subject of discussion. The method used to elect or appoint women MPs (through the quota system) affects their capacity to challenge the patriarchal norms and values that continue to influence parliamentary debates. For instance, when the Speaker of the House made a sexist joke in order to defend his position on the board of a telephone company, no female MP dared to protest, only civil society actors challenged him and demanded that he apologize to the women of Tanzania, which he did. In addition, some MPs have been trivializing the debate on HIV/AIDS as an issue concerning the female dress code, for example, without protest from female MPs. When a female civil society activist was brought before a parliamentary committee for what appeared to be an interrogation for having the audacity to challenge the sexual behaviour of MPs in the era of HIV/AIDS, female members of parliament did not object.

Who Decides who Represents the Women's Quota?

The reserved seats for women are allocated in direct proportion to the number of seats a political party wins in the parliamentary elections. Each of the victorious political parties sets out its own mechanisms for appointing/electing candidates, some of which are not included in the constitution of the party. In the 2000 general election, only the ruling party made its mechanism a little more competitive by allowing women party members to elect their representatives and also by broadening the base of representation also to include, for example, representatives of NGOs and female intellectuals. Other political parties have not yet defined a mechanism for electing or appointing members to these positions. This introduces into the political system the potential for corruption, including sexual corruption, thereby undermining the integrity of female candidates, even those who entered via a more transparent system.

The special seats arrangement, however, seems to be more beneficial to the ruling party than to any other party in terms of increasing numbers. This is indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Special Seats for Women MP's by Political Party in the 2000 General Election

Political party	Number of special seats	Percentage
1. Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM)	41	85.42
2. Chama Cha Wananchi (CCF)	4	8.34
3. Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA)	1	2.08
4. United Democratic Party (UDP)	1	2.08
5. Tanzania Labour Party (TLP)	1	2.08
Total	48	100

Source: National Electoral Commission, 2001.

The special seats arrangement seems to increase the voice of the ruling party in a multi-party parliament. Similarly, at the local level, the ruling party seems to have benefited equally in terms of numbers, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Special Seats for Councillors by Political Party in the 2000 General Election

Political party	Number of special seats	Percentage
1. Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM)	863	93.18
2. Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (CHADEMA)	18	1.94
3. Tanzania Labour Party (TLP)	15	1.63
4. Chama Cha Wananchi (CCF)	12	1.30
5. United Democratic Party (UDP)	12	1.30
6. National Convention for Construction and Reform (NCCR-MAGEUZI)	5	0.54
7. Tanzania Democratic Alliance Party (TADEA)	1	0.11
8. Tanzania People's Party (TPP)	0	0
9. Union for Multi-party Democracy (UMD)	0	0
10. Popular National Party (PONA)	0	0
11. National Reconstruction Alliance (NRA)	0	0
12. National League for Democracy (NLD)	0	0
13. United People's Democratic Party (UPDP)	0	0
Total	926	100

Source: National Electoral Commission, 2001.

The special seats have indeed helped the ruling party to continue to enjoy an overwhelming majority in the multi-party parliament. It is a special arrangement to engage women without necessarily threatening the chances of their male competitors in regard to accessing parliament. Also, it is a safe way of involving women without transforming the male-

dominated culture of parliamentary politics.

Issues of Accountability

Women entering politics through the special seats are not necessarily accountable to the majority of women, particularly those who do not belong to political parties. Screening methods give political parties a great deal of control over who enters politics by this route. The quota system has served as a subtle mechanism to prevent certain women from participating in competitive politics. Political parties do not seem to be supportive of the quota system in principle, since none of the existing political parties has introduced a quota in relation to party leadership positions. The political parties that screen candidates are male dominated, and through old boys' networks a lot of the work is done to back or discredit competitors.

During the parliamentary elections of 2000, for instance, there were 7,386 male contestants from all political parties, and just 526 female contestants from all political parties. Of these, 526 men were selected during the primary screening process, while only 70 women were selected by their respective parties to contest parliamentary seats. Of the 70 female candidates, only 12 won constituency seats. Reserved seats have taken the pressure off political parties to nominate women to stand in constituency seats.

This implies that special seats have eroded the competitive 'power' of women in regard to what is constructed as the 'normal' way of entering parliament and other representative organs of the state. This has had or will have an impact on 'gender power' in these institutions. For instance, 'powerful' women, such as Kete Kamba, Anna Makinda, Zakia Meghji and Gertrude Mongella, were forced to resort to special seats, since their chances of winning constituency seats were minimal. Kamba, for example, who was secretary-general of the women's wing, lost her parliamentary seat in the 1985 general election after opting to compete in constituency politics. Her defeat was a message to most women that they had been given special seats, and that they should not dare to intrude into the male domain. Prior to the constitutional amendments of 1997, the names of women candidates proposed by the women's wing of the party had to be endorsed by parliament, which was dominated by men. The majority of women, and indeed the rest of the population, had little say as to who entered parliament through the defined special seats arrangement.

This method was changed slightly as a result of the constitutional amendment of 1997, which allowed political parties to have the final say on the women who entered parliament via the special seats. Women are thus entering politics through special measures that are organized and managed by political parties and political parties are assigned a percentage of seats in proportion to the overall number that they hold in parliament. Each political party has instituted its own internal mechanisms of electing or nominating female representatives for these special seats. However, this complicates the issue of accountability in regard to women MPs who have entered politics through the special seats. Whose interest do they represent? When women and gender-related issues are in conflict with the party interest, what position will these women take?

Positive action to promote women's participation in formal politics in Tanzania has neither had a significant impact on numerical representation nor transformed the male dominated

political culture in parliament and in district councils. Since those who enter politics as a result of positive action are sponsored by their political parties, their primary interest is to toe the party line. Political parties have not shown a serious interest in transforming party politics to accommodate women in the governance structures of the party. There is no single political party that has introduced positive action in regard to female representation in its highest organs, including the central committee and the national executive council, as well as in relation to party leadership at the regional, district or ward levels.

In the Tanzanian context, lack of serious party support for a transformation process that will lead to women's political empowerment is a major constraint to promoting women's participation in formal political structures.

Conclusion

While special seats continue to be the most direct measure to tackle the increasing imbalance in regard to women's participation in politics, they do not seem to address in any significant manner issues concerning equity and equality in terms of political representation. The special seats arrangement should complement other efforts to transform political norms and values, which discriminate against women and other disadvantaged groups.

Male dominated political parties can manipulate quotas in order to increase their numerical representation. Lack of transparency in regard to the election of candidates, and the central role that political parties play in the screening exercise, have defeated the whole purpose of redressing the gender imbalance. Political parties have been paying lip service to special seats – there has been no genuine attempt to transform party politics in a way that will enhance women's ability to hold strategic positions within the party organs. However, all political parties consider women to be central to mobilizing the support of members and, during an election campaign, in mobilizing voters to support party candidates.

The link between civil society activists and women parliamentarians is not strong enough. Hence, no strategies have emerged for collective action to advance women's participation in politics. And yet, women matter in terms of their role as voters who finally decide who gets into power. The need for strategies to counter manipulative tactics by political parties has to be underscored.

Despite the constraints, the presence of women in parliament has had a modest impact on debates in Tanzania, particularly the raising of issues pertinent to the specific interests of women. To achieve greater change, though, a critical mass in parliament and other representative organs needs to support processes that address the patriarchal political culture. Numbers do matter, but women MPs and councillors have to be supported by programmes that will enhance their political consciousness, as well as their confidence to take part in parliamentary debates.

Endnotes

¹ Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) and Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC) 1997. (incomplete reference)

² Southern African Development Community Electoral Support Network (SADC-ESN). 2000. 'Gender Checklist For Free and Fair Elections Southern Africa'. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP).

³ Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) and Southern African Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC) 1999. (incomplete reference)

Further Reading

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