



ASSESSING LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION AMONG WOMEN IN POLICY FORMULATION

PREPARED BY:

RESEARCH:

Alice M. Pearce (Researcher) with the support of Bernadette Deka Zulu (Executive Director)

TECHNICAL REVIEW:

Akabondo Kabechani (Head of Monitoring & Evaluation)

EDITORIAL TEAM:

Chiti Jacob Nkunde (Communication Specialist) **Layout and Design**

Melody Simukali (Head of Communications & Grants) **Editorial**

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
WHO	World Health Organisation
JCTR	Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection

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INTRODUCTION

The commitment of the current Government in promoting gender equity in its National Development Agenda is evident from the concrete steps taken by the leadership in ensuring ‘no one is left behind’ and expresses the conviction that boys and girls, men and women should benefit equally from development in Zambia. This has been demonstrated to a large extent by Government’s strong will and commitment to empowering women and the youth into high positions of responsibility in the public sector and the support provided to those in the private sector. It believes women are key stakeholders in decision making. They play a huge role in providing unique perspectives into various issues that not only impact their socio-economic spheres at individual level, but also at community and

national development level. Women’s participation in the overall national development agenda should be viewed as not only a fundamental human right, but also as a marker of good governance. In spite of this, gender power dynamics still shape many parts of society. **Globally, women continue to be under-represented in the formulation of national policies as well as in the political and economic decision-making spheres (Domingo et al., 2015).** According to Cliveti et al. (2005) **the equal participation of men and women in decision making is a precondition of a functional democracy.** Therefore, securing the interests of women in policy formulation is a political issue that requires a political process. One way of enhancing women’s voices is through political participation and electoral

reform. Increasing the space women occupy in politics could provide them a platform to influence decision-making and give them a greater voice.

Participation refers to the extent to which one's voice is heard, respected and applied in decision-making, planning, implementation and monitoring of actions (FAO, 2014). Therefore, a high presence of women may not translate into their full participation or mean that their concerns have been taken into consideration. Thus, it is necessary to assess the extent to which their voices

are heard and applied as numbers alone may not yield positive change. Undermining women's voices could lower levels of participation in policy formulation even further. Hence, it is important to take into consideration the factors that impede women's participation. These factors can be intersectional in nature and recognizing how they influence each other is vital in addressing participation levels. These could include **the education levels of women, their physical ability, age, culture, religion, sexual orientation, location and socio-economic class** among others.

Participation may take two forms; **formal** and **informal**. Recognizing how societal and religious norms, and culture could hinder women from airing their voice in public spaces may influence one's decision on which form to take in advancing women's participation. For instance, women may lack the confidence or skills to speak in public or in the presence of men as culture prescribes. Similarly, male presence could intimidate women from assertively expressing their opinions around various issues that negatively affect them or privilege men. In the same vein, religious norms detect that women be submissive to men while others discourage their members from taking part in politics. Such socialization could pose a challenge for women to criticize or give opinions at such platforms. These norms could also influence how women perceive participating in public discussions. Therefore, policy makers should strive at providing women friendly spaces to ensure their concerns are adequately heard (Akerkar, 2001). This can be done through sub-committee meetings at community level, giving special attention to the voices of the most vulnerable women ensuring that they are heard and their interests are well represented. Similarly, preliminary meetings with women's groups could help identify priority points for discussion and decision-making before formal meetings are held. This approach could encourage women to actively participate and feel included.



There are various international and regional commitments drawn to support the advancement of women and ensure their full participation without discrimination based on their gender. Zambia is signatory to and has ratified conventions and frameworks that include; the **Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, the **Beijing Platform for Action**, the **Sustainable Development Goals**, the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, the **United Nation’s Framework Convention for Climate Change**, the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**, the **International Conference on Population and Development**, the **Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa** and the **SADC Gender Protocol** among others. These frameworks have been crucial in improving the status of women globally as well as in mainstreaming a rights-based approach in governance and policy discourse.

POLICY FORMULATION PROCESS; WHAT ROLE CAN WOMEN PLAY?

Policy can be referred to as a set of guidelines put in place in order to solve an identified problem or define a course of action (PMRC, 2016). It offers a clear procedure that is within the confines of the law. Hence, policy formulation is a highly political process that requires political will for it to be successfully implemented and enforced. A policy is formulated after a clear understanding of the existence of a problem, through consultation with various stakeholders and ratification by decision makers. The various stakeholders can include; **community action groups, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), activists, community members, and**

any interested parties or individuals in the policy formulation process.

In order for a policy to be considered inclusive and responsive it requires the input of the people, particularly those who are most likely to be affected by it or by the lack of it. Additionally, it

needs to be backed up by an existing law or the enactment of a law that directly supports it. This makes it legally binding as well as enforceable. In Zambia, key policy makers include; Ministers, Cabinet Secretariat, Cabinet Committees.

According to WHO (2005), there are 5 key phases involved in policy formulation. These are:



1. Problem identification and agenda setting

In this phase research and statistics play a vital role in identifying the existence of a problem. This stages also involves advocacy and rallying political support in order to get political recognition of the problem.



2. Policy formation

Once the problem is on the political agenda the next phase is to involve various stakeholders and hold consultative meetings. This stage has to be as inclusive as possible especially towards parties that are most likely to be affected by the inexistence of such a policy. It is also at this stage that a policy is formed.



3. Policy adoption

A policy is then adopted by cabinet and enacted into law.



4. Policy implementation

At this stage a policy is put into practice and resources are availed to aid enforcement.



5. Policy evaluation

This is a crucial stage of the formulation process as it assesses the impact of a policy. The evaluation offers opportunities for improvement and highlights potential challenges and negative impacts that can then be applied to refine the formulation process or the entire policy.

Women can play an important role in policy formulation. These include:

- Giving unique insight and experiences that could shape policy in a more holistic approach
- Highlighting the recognition of social diversity in various policy issues brought to the fore
- Assist in advancing principals of equity, equality and social justice that shape policy
- Draw attention to women-specific issues that may be overlooked by other parties

OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE POLICY MAKING PROCESS IN ZAMBIA

Zambia is a signatory to the Beijing Declaration that prompts Governments to make deliberate efforts to empower women across all sectors of society into taking up decision-making positions. It is therefore the Government's duty to ensure that state machinery is conducive and supports the advancement of women in all spheres, particularly in the public sphere where they have been historically marginalized. One way of giving women a voice is through political engagement. By doing so, women can take on key policy issues that directly impact them.

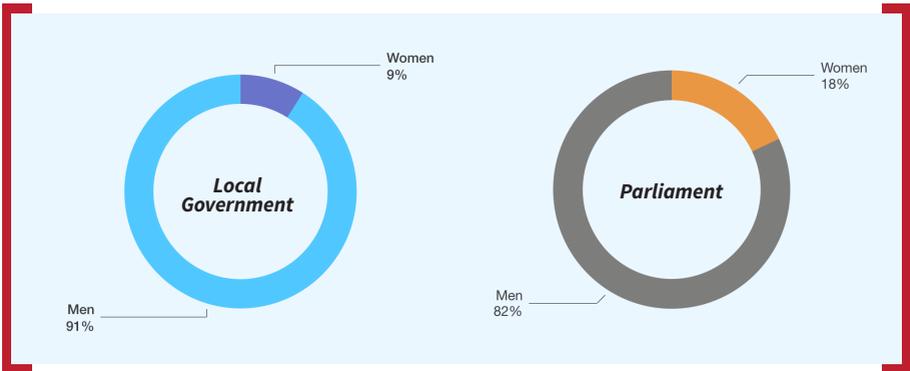
These include; **access to education for the girl-child, paid maternity leave, quality and affordable healthcare, decent working conditions with equal pay for equal work and many others.**

Literature that tracks the progress made by women in policy formulation in Zambia seems to be lacking. There seems to be a gap in information and this calls for more research on the issue in order to understand and offer solutions to the challenges Zambian women face in gaining access and recognition in the

political arena as well as their reluctance to participate in policy debates. **Although women have penetrated the Zambian political scene at Parliamentary and council level, the numbers still remain relatively low and almost insignificant to attain a 50/50 gender representation** (JCTR, n.d.). A 2018 report by the Ministry of Gender ranked Zambia 4th lowest in the region with regard to women's political

participation. The report also shows that women's participation in the 2016 general election stood at 9% at local government and 18% at Parliamentary level. Although this is a marginal increase from the 6% at local government and 15% at Parliament level recorded in the 2011 elections, these figures are considerably low in achieving a gender inclusive and representative governance system.

Gender Representation in the 2016 General Election



Furthermore, these figures are also indicative of a largely patriarchal political climate in Zambia where majority of women involved in politics are relegated to running less influential factions of political parties such as women's leagues that rally support for male political figures while men are considered

as decision makers holding most senior and strategic positions in the party. This could also entail that the levels of influence women have in decision-making are compromised. Thus, political parties need to address this by deliberately formulating a quota system alongside a Zebra list that ensures

proportional allocation of positions among men and women within their party structures to promote women's political participation at local and national level. **In order for Zambia to achieve 50/50 representation it needs to emulate countries such as Rwanda, Uganda, Namibia, South Africa and Mauritius that have successfully implemented the gender quota system in their party structures in order to get more women into key decision-making positions in Government.** A lack of political will to address the situation is a marker of the patriarchal system that Zambia subscribes to which traditionally confines women to the home as caregivers while men make policies that directly impact the lives of women and girls.

GENDER REPRESENTATIONS OF VARIOUS PUBLIC OFFICE BEARERS IN ZAMBIA

Achieving gender equality across all sectors is a goal that Zambia aspires to. Over the years, some progress has been made in creating an inclusive labour force with policies such as Affirmative Action and the Labour Act that prevent the discrimination of women in accessing various fields of employment. More and more women have risen to top positions in their fields as well as in what were previously considered male dominated workspaces. However, women still face various challenges that prevent them from progressing as fast as their male counterparts and in some cases having to put in more effort in order to gain recognition in some fields.

The 'glass-ceiling' has continued to be a reality for many women. In Zambia, the Judiciary has taken progressive steps in appointing more women at top ranks. However, progress in the public service and Parliament has been relatively slow with men holding most of the top positions. Below are graphical depictions of gender representation across several fields.



The Judiciary

Figure 1 depicts the progress made in the Zambian Judiciary in facilitating the representation of women in the Judicial arm of Government. For

instance, in 2015 a female Chief Justice was appointed at the highest level of the judicial hierarchy. In addition, the number of women appointed as Judges is relatively proportional to that of men and has been increasing over the years. This represents a healthy gender-balance in the judicial system. However, there are more men appointed as magistrates than women which poses a challenge for achieving greater representation and equality at that level.

Figure 1: Gender Representation in the Judicial system.

YEAR	NUMBER OF PERSONS					
	Chief Justices		Judges		Magistrates	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
2014	0	0	23	25	169	68
2015	0	1	24	25	170	73
2016	0	1	30	31	180	88
2017	0	1	29	30	181	99
2018	0	1	31	32	201	105

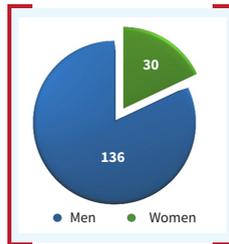
KEY	Chief Justices		Judges		Magistrates	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
	Blue	Light Blue	Yellow	Light Yellow	Red	Light Red



Parliament

Figure 2 below is a representation of members of Parliament by gender. Men hold 136 (81.9%) of the seats in Parliament while women hold the remaining 30 (18.1%). These statistics highlight the need for radical reform to increase the number of seats women hold in Parliament through a Zebra list alongside a quota system.

Figure 2: Gender representation of Members of Parliament



Public Service

The statistics in **Figure 3** below highlight the need for radical reforms to increase the number of positions women hold in various decision-making portfolios in the public service to further bridge the gender disparities at management level.

Figure 3: Gender Representations of Management Positions in the Public Service



INTERSECTIONAL ISSUES AFFECTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Women constitute a heterogeneous group with different characteristics and unique qualities. **Within groups of women it is important to be cautious of their positionalities and not assume homogeneity of the group (Akerkar, 2001).** In society, various factors tend to converge to hinder women from participating in political processes such as policy formulation. **These socio-economic factors include; levels of education, physical ability, age, location, race, culture, religion, sexual orientation and economic class.** These factors cannot be considered in isolation as they are intersectional in nature. For instance, a middle-aged, middle-class woman with higher levels of education, living in a low-density urban area is more likely to participate in a policy formulation exercise in comparison to a middle-aged, working-class woman with lower levels of education residing in a high-density informal urban setting and facing some type of physical disability. Likewise, a woman who is a peasant farmer living in a rural area without basic education is less likely to assume she could influence policy. The

individual characteristics and positionalities of the women in the contexts highlighted shape their perspectives differently. Thus, impacting their participation or lack of. Policy makers need to take into consideration how these factors influence ones' participation in policy formulation and find ways to reduce these barriers. Assuming that women have the same needs or face the same challenges could lead to poor participation levels among them and also under-plays the power and influence that some women wield over others.

Moreover, there are multiple factors that could hinder different women from participating in the policy-making discourse. These barriers could be structural in nature or agency barriers (William, 1992). Broadly, **structural barriers** are those that are embedded within systems or processes that may hinder an individual from exercising their free will or participating in certain tasks. **Factors such as; lack of access to education or civic knowledge may prevent an individual from making informed decisions or, the systematic discrimination of women from**

partaking in socio-political debate based on their gender.

Such barriers often entail political interventions such as law reforms or policy actions to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized women. While on the other hand, **agency barriers** are issues that an individual may experience at a personal level that limits their ability to exercise free will. **For instance, the lack of confidence or willingness to participate in an activity are limitations to ones' agency.** These may be resolved through easier interventions such as capacity building, improving the civic knowledge of citizens or raising awareness on the importance of partaking in political processes. However, these barriers may not resonate with women in the same way since what may be relevant to some may not apply to others. Domingo et al. (2015) argue that, contextualizing the various factors could assist in resolving some constraints to an extent but may not provide a solution to all barriers. Firstly, women's individual capabilities and resources could influence one's participation. Similarly, socio-political, economic and cultural issues largely shape women's experiences. As such, these experiences may have a push and pull effect. For instance, if one is more informed or has a certain

level of education they are more likely to take an interest in political issues whether it affects them as an individual or as a collective. Conversely, women with poor civic knowledge may opt to shy away from participating in national issues.

Economic class also tends to pose a barrier for women to actively participate in policy issues thus, increasing their vulnerability and further under-mining their interests. Enhancing women's economic potential could accord them more social power and influence beyond the household and community level, further encouraging them to take an interest in national issues. **Another barrier is culture and religion. Generally, women are socialized not to challenge the authority of men.** Promoting a paradigm shift in society that appreciates and values women's contributions could not only encourage women to participate but it may also lead to a more gender inclusive and responsive policy system across all sectors. Thus, challenging various structural issues such as religious values, societal norms and culture is imperative in addressing some barriers that prevent women from exercising their agency.

ENABLERS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Generally, women tend to feel more confident when they are in large numbers. Converging with other women that share similar interests may not only boost their confidence but it could also positively influence other women to participate in policy formulation. **This could also accord them a safe space to consult, share knowledge and experiences with other women and increase their social power.**

Similarly, raising civic and technical knowledge of women as well as the general education and access to information on political issues could contribute to the confidence needed to articulate and challenge policy discourse as well as actively participate. It could also raise their credibility, voice and influence thus giving them more status in society. Interventions such as facilitating trainings, mentoring and capacity building workshops targeted at women could help build their self-esteem, public speaking skills and self-awareness. Furthermore, the media plays a major role in how women are perceived. They act as agents of change but could also be potentially harmful to women's representation in society. For instance, the media can perpetuate negative stereotypes about women

or broadcast images that demean women's character and strengths. Thus, improving how the media portrays women could influence how society responds to them and increase their confidence as active agents of development.

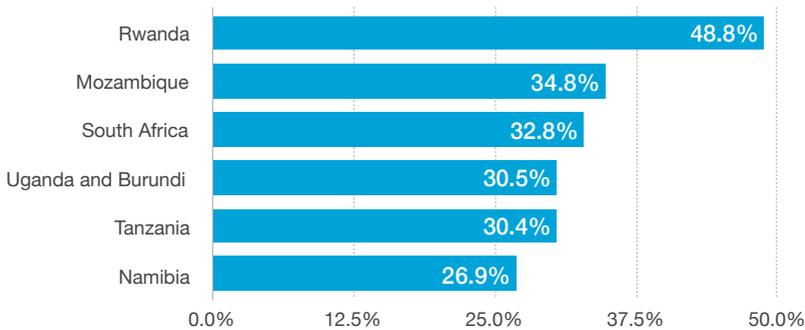
Additionally, addressing the intersectional issues that act as barriers for the participation of women is vital. For instance, educating women and capacitating them to train others on the importance of their participation could yield positive results. Similarly, engaging in strategic partnerships with various institutions that promote the empowerment of women could assist in engaging more grassroots women at community level. Moreover, strengthening partnerships with men as agents of change and **dismantling gender stereotypes could influence change in how both genders perceive the participation of women.** NGOs and CSOs are ideal strategic partners that aim at giving women a voice and often offer solidarity and a platform for women to express their needs and concerns on important national and personal issues affecting them. They also play a critical advocacy role in advancing the status of women. They act as

important enablers of women’s inclusion and empowerment across various sectors of society.

COUNTRIES WITH HIGH FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN THE POLICY LANDSCAPE

The implementation of a quota system has raised women’s participation in countries such as:

Figure 4: Countries with high female representation in the policy landscape



Rwanda has not only polled as a top African country with the highest female Parliamentary representation, it also tops the ranks globally. Below is an assessment of three unique cases pioneering the path for African women in decision-making:



RWANDA: Despite having faced a genocide over two decades ago, Rwanda has emerged as a success story of political, economic and social inspiration globally. It has made tremendous strides in driving the women’s empowerment agenda with women holding key decision-making portfolios and benchmarked as a model for gender inclusivity in its governance system. **Women account for 70% of Rwanda’s post-genocide population.** Although women were forced to step up due to the civil war, their successes cannot be undermined either. In the last decade, the country has recorded a GDP growth of almost 8%. In 2003, Rwanda committed itself to reserving 30% of its parliamentary seats for women. Gradually, women have advanced

to surpass the threshold with 64% of these seats currently being held by women. This highlights the active political will by the Government to partner with women as strategic contributors to sustainable development. Other policies in place have enforced compulsory education for boys and girls at primary through secondary school level in order to sustain its gender equality aspirations. Similarly, women can own and inherit property, they are encouraged to take up leadership roles in community and key institutions. Their successes have also doubled the life expectancy of its population due to a universal healthcare system in place that covers over 90% of its population (Amour-Levar, 2018). Its strong national policies have seen infant mortality rates and violence against women drop drastically. The case of Rwanda offers unique insight into the social, economic and political transformation nations can achieve by transcending norms that undermine the participation and contributions of women.



SEYCHELLES: Although a relatively small country with a parliament of nearly 33 members, it has made significant strides in achieving gender parity across various structures of society. ***In 2012 Seychelles was ranked the 4th highest country in the world with the most gender balanced Parliamentary representation and 2nd in Africa with 43.8% of women in Parliament.*** Most interesting is that it achieved such high levels of representation minus a quota system in place. This can be attributed to their commitment towards the 50/50 target of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, their progressive education policy and their matriarchal lineage. Seychellois women are considered to wield great influence in the home and public spheres. According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, as cited in (Make Every Woman Count, 2016), over 55% of households were female-headed and women's concentration in professional fields were two times higher than that of men with 59% of the labour force being female. Interestingly, there are 'no known' barriers that hinder women from participating at political, economic or social levels across society. Seychellois women enjoy a considerably high status in society which is a dramatic contrast to many African countries. Furthermore, their progressive education policy has achieved equality in access to education with nearly 94% literacy rates. This is important in achieving and sustaining

gender balance and equality across sectors of society. In spite of all this, the country still battles with violence against women and children with issues such as rape and domestic violence identified as a major problem. Even though women represent a great part of legislators, the Government struggles to effectively enforce existing laws that protect women and girls. Nonetheless, it is still considered one of the most progressive African countries in effecting policies towards empowering women and mainstreaming gender across all programs in society (Make Every Woman Count, 2016).



SOUTH AFRICA: According to Vetten (2016) the case of South Africa is quite different compared to that of Rwanda. Despite the quota system having helped increase gender parity between men and women in South Africa's parliament, it has not dramatically changed the gender power dynamics at play in decision making and transforming the lives of many women. In the first democratic election of 1994 women's representation drastically increased from 2.8% to 27.7% owing to the implementation of the 30% quota system. Additionally, structures to advance women's empowerment such as the National Gender Machinery and the Commission for Gender Equality were enacted. Female parliamentarians actively sought out to include women's policy interests on the political agenda, by developing strong links with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that promote women's empowerment. Such partnerships resulted in law reforms that led to the recognition of equality and rights of women within the family, the advancement of women's bodily autonomy and support for women's empowerment. Similarly, the ANC Parliamentary Women's Caucus initiated a joint campaign to End Violence Against Women and Children in the Western Cape. Various reforms such as the Domestic Violence Act (1998), Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act (2007) are a result of women's influence in getting their rights recognized. On the other hand, women have continued to face tremendous resistance in advancing women's issues in Parliament. **A Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill proposing 50/50 representation across boards and leadership structures in all sectors was passed in 2014 amid criticism by various stakeholders.** Although, there have been many challenges in advancing women's voices in South Africa, activists have continued to put pressure on legislators to enact and strengthen laws that uphold women's status and wellbeing in society.

LESSONS FOR ZAMBIA

The three case studies above demonstrate the roles women play as key strategic partners in development and why they should be included in the decision-making process for good governance. Similarly, women offer unique insight and experiences that only they can articulate and offer solutions regarding the challenges that directly influence their wellbeing. Take South Africa and Rwanda for instance, women were responsible for drawing attention to social problems such as gender based violence, rape, inheritance and property rights. This resulted in policies that offer empowerment and social protection to victims of abuse as well as recognizing women's rights as human rights.

In Seychelles, the status of women is highly recognized partly due to their matriarchal culture. However, they still form a significant part of the active work force that drives the country's economy. This shows that women can hold positions of power and that they too can positively contribute to development beyond the household. Furthermore, by advancing equal access to education among boys and girls, the country further reduces potential inequalities

among the sexes and society at large which is also the case in Rwanda. This means, every literate individual is able to actively contribute to the wellbeing of their families, communities and ultimately the nation at large.

In spite of these successes, more needs to be done to advance the status of women. Policies alone are not enough as is the case in South Africa and Seychelles that continue to face challenges in curbing gender-based violations against women and children. In the case of Seychelles, good policies are in place, but the Government lacks the political will to implement and strictly enforce them.

In the same vein, the quota system alongside a Zebra list is a necessity for Zambia if it intends to attain a 50/50 gender representation as set by SADC. Reliance on general commitments to the goal alone will not yield significant results for a largely patriarchal society like Zambia. Therefore, adopting the quota system as is the case in Rwanda and South Africa will not only raise political representation but it will also advance the mainstreaming of gender diversity into every aspect of society especially in positions of decision making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- PMRC proposes Zambia adopts a customized quota system alongside a Zebra list that will increase the representation of women in decision making as well as strategically place them in positions of power within party structures and across all boards with increased exposure to leadership roles.
- There is need to raise civic awareness and increase access to information among women in order to advance their participation in the policy discourse.
- Addressing the structural and intersectional barriers that impede women from exercising their agency on political issues could improve the participation of women and protect their overall interests.
- In view of implementing the quota system, Zambia needs to find ways of avoiding an artificial representation of women or tokenism across all sectors. It needs to ensure that women assert real power and influence in their respective capacities.

CONCLUSION

Women are key contributors to national development and their inclusion is a positive step towards an inclusive and good governance system. Policies are critical in achieving development and women add a unique perspective and experience to them. **However, there are various barriers that perpetuate the under-representation of women and prevent them from actively participating in the formulation of policy. These barriers could be structural or agency and most importantly intersectional in nature.** Meaning that, various factors could converge to limit women's participation in policy discourse. Additionally, more needs to be done to encourage women to participate especially at parliamentary level where the decisions are made and women are seriously under-represented. Notably, some advancements have been made in various sectors such as the Judiciary where women have been appointed to key-decision making positions. However, the same cannot be said about parliamentary representation. **Placing a quota on the number of seats reserved for women in parliament has shown positive improvements in various countries where it has been successfully implemented. Furthermore, Zambia needs to emulate these countries if it is to attain its goal of achieving gender equality.** Finally, there is a need to increase the civic knowledge of women and consultation of the marginalized in order to gain meaningful participation and inclusivity.

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Unlocking Zambia's Potential

Correspondence on this Analysis can be sent to:
info@pmrczambia.net

Policy Monitoring & Research Centre
Ministry of National Development Complex,
Corner of John Mbita and Nationalist Roads,
Ridgewa - Lusaka.

Phone: +260 211 269717, 0979 015660.

Private Bag KL 10

Tel: +260 211 269 717 | +260 979 015 660

www.pmrczambia.com

