Parliamentary Performance and Gender

Rumbidzai Dube, Senior Researcher

November 2013
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A gendered analysis of the last year of the Seventh Parliament of Zimbabwe indicates that the general facilitatory and inhibitory dynamics affecting ordinary women’s participation in politics and decision-making are the same dynamics that affect women in Parliament. Women who take an active role in governance and political life are confronted by inhibiting factors including patriarchy and the violent nature of the political terrain. Women who manage to attain political office would have clearly overcome enormous hurdles relative to their male counterparts. In Parliament, women still have to deal with the pervasive patriarchal attitudes that at times prevent them from fully participating. Even the President has proven himself not to be immune to the prejudices of his gender with recent remarks that the limited number of women appointees in ministerial posts was due to the lack of educated and qualified women.1 With this broad context in mind, this report examines the performance of female parliamentarians versus their male counterparts, and is complementary to and draws from RAU’s earlier report on parliamentary attendance. Some key findings highlighted in this report:

- Women were a significant minority in the Seventh Parliament 34/210 in the House of Assembly and 23/93 in the Senate;
- As a group, female MPs attendance was more impressive than that of their male counterparts. All of them, except one, scored attendance rates above 25%. The exception was the Vice President with a 23% attendance rate. Given her enormous responsibilities outside Parliament, she still did better than most non-executive male MPs;
- In the House of Assembly, Honourable Margaret Matienga of the MDC-T party held the highest record of attendance, 47 out of 48 (98%);
- The female MP who had the least attendance rate in the house that she represented; Senate was Senator Priscilla Misihairambwi-Mushonga of the MDC party who recorded a 100% absentee record in the whole year;
- On average, women spoke 9.7 times in Senate and 6.5 times in the House of Assembly the whole year (June 2012-June 2013);
- Most female MPs seemed generally afraid to voice their opinions and speak boldly on technical matters as much as the men did in Parliament. This included even some female parliamentarians who hold very senior positions in their parties and have considerable political clout;
- An important milestone achievement for women in the Seventh Parliament was the inclusion of provisions seeking to achieve gender equality within all spheres of life in the new Constitution.

---

See also SW Radio, ‘Shock as Mugabe says few women educated enough to be Ministers,’ 13 September 2013 http://www.swradioafrica.com/2013/09/13/shock-as-mugabe-says-few-women-educated-enough-to-be-ministers/;
INTRODUCTION: WOMEN AND POLITICS

Zimbabwean women are taking, or trying to take, a much more active role in the governance and political life of the country despite the highly patriarchal nature of Zimbabwean society. Heide\(^2\) stated “. . . we will no longer be led only by that half of the population whose socialisation, through toys, games, values and expectations, sanctions violence as the final assertion of manhood, synonymous with nationhood.” It is sentiments such as Heide’s that have stirred the move for the participation of women in decision-making, arguing that women’s interests are best represented by other women who share the same lived experiences. But the question of whether women leaders wield power differently, represent other women better than men, and whether they can change the rules of the political game significantly enough to bring a real difference in the lives of other women remains largely unanswered.

In Zimbabwe, it is clear that women vote in elections, and research by the Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) in 2010 indicated that the number of women that do actually vote is about 15% less than those that are eligible to vote.\(^3\) There are many reasons for this discrepancy, and certainly one of these is the difficulties that women face in getting registered to vote. Women encounter many more difficulties in obtaining legal and necessary documents than men do.\(^4\) In addition, the political climate can have facilitatory or inhibitory effects on women’s participation in both elections and political involvement. Since 2000, the political climate has been marred by a highly polarised political environment and a series of violent elections. Incidences of violence increased with each election period, notably the 2000 Parliamentary election, the 2002 Presidential election, the 2005 Parliamentary election and the 2008 Harmonised (Municipal, Parliamentary and Presidential) election.

The Figure (over) illustrates these trends.

\(^2\) Heide WS (1921-1985) American feminist, author, social activist and feminist movement leader.
\(^3\) RAU (2010), Women, Politics and the Zimbabwe Crisis, Report produced by Idasa (An African Democracy Institute), the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), the Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU), and the Women’s’ Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ). May 2010. HARARE: RESEARCH & ADVOCACY UNIT.
As women have described this climate, 67% stated that they felt “unsafe” or “very unsafe” during elections and a startling 62% said that they experienced some form of political violence in 2008. It is evident, from this figure that the tendency for violence during elections exists as the graph markedly records increases in incidences of violence during election years.

This trend – towards violently contested elections – does not only affect women, but women are obviously more vulnerable, and especially in the rural areas. Undoubtedly this not only affects women’s decisions as voters, but also their decisions about whether to seek political office. This has made the issue of representation in decision-making, an already difficult issue in a boldly patriarchal society, even more so for women in Zimbabwe. The fact that political participation can invite violence and threats dissuades women from participating.

In the gender analysis of the June 2013 Voters’ Roll, some worrying statistics emerged concerning women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Gender comparison – June Voters’ Roll and 2012 Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 See again RAU (2010), *Women, Politics and the Zimbabwe Crisis*.
The differences overall were largely insignificant, and the gender distribution on the Voters’ Roll was virtually identical to that of the 2012 Census. However, when the comparative registration rate of males and females was examined, clear differences emerged. Although there is a ratio of 52:48 for all females to males nationally, the ratio of females to males in the adult population is somewhat higher 54:46. Thus, the percentage of adult women registered as voters (85%) is lower than that of men (94%). Furthermore, there were marked differences in the registration rates of rural and urban women and in the rates of young to older women.

There was a marked bias towards more women being registered in rural provinces, with the exception of Mashonaland West Province. Significantly fewer women were registered as voters in the two metropolitan Provinces. Whether this implies that women in the rural areas are more strongly motivated to participate in political processes, or there are other factors at play, is a subject of further research.

**Table 2: Percentage of women registered as voters by Province**

*Derived from RAU (2013), Gender Audit of June 2013 Voters’ Roll*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>% women registered as voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bulawayo</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harare</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manicaland</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashonaland Central</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashonaland East</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashonaland West</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masvingo</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matabeleland North</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matabeleland South</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The gender audit also revealed that there is a strong bias in favour of older women, but this (and the bias towards higher registration in rural Provinces) holds equally for men.

Overall, RAU commented in respect of women as voters:

*When the voters’ roll is disaggregated according to gender, it is reflecting the same irregularities as those found when taking a bird’s eye view of the roll. There is under-registration of young women under 30, there is over-registration in rural areas in comparison to urban areas, and there are a large number of elderly women, predominately in the rural provinces.*

---

9. This is confirmed when comparing Harare Province with Mashonaland Central, as examples. In Harare Province, the registration rate of women is only 63%, against 83% for men. In all instances, when considering the registration rate, the general problem of over-registration for both genders must be borne in mind. Urban registration rates for women thus appear to be extremely low. By contrast, in Mashonaland Central the rate is 92% for women and 90% for men. See RAU (2013), *Gender Audit of June 2013 Voters’ Roll.*

Thus, women that manage to achieve political office have clearly overcome enormous hurdles relative to their male counterparts. In Parliament, they must still deal, not with violence, but with pervasive patriarchal attitudes. Even the President has proven himself not to be immune to the prejudices of his gender with his recent remarks that the lack of women appointees to ministerial posts is due to the lack of educated and qualified women. These remarks exemplify the difficulties that women still face in seeking representation and participation in Zimbabwe’s political life.

So, it is interesting to examine how women actually do perform in Parliament, and why we have provided a disaggregated report on women in Parliament to complement our earlier report on Parliamentary attendance.

METHODOLOGY
This report draws on the same methodology and data as the previous report. The study focused on the last year of the Seventh Parliament, running from June 2012 to June 2013. During this period, there were 48 sittings of the House of Assembly and 50 sittings of the Senate. Data relating to participation of parliamentarians was derived from a total of 98 Volumes of the Hansard, accessed directly from the Public Records Section of the Parliament of Zimbabwe, each corresponding directly with the sittings of the Houses. The statistics relating to attendance derived from the attendance register, as maintained by the Papers Section of the parliamentary Secretariat for the period June 2012 to June 2013. The Attendance Register was secured through a formal request made to, and approved by, the Clerk of Parliament.

WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT
Women were a significant minority in the Seventh Parliament. Of the 210 members of the House of Assembly – now the National Assembly – only 34 were female, and there were only 23 females in the Senate out of 93 members.

Table 3 (below) shows the distribution of the parliamentarians according to House and party.

13 These are Volumes 39/1 to 39/30 and Volumes 38/36 to 38/53 for the House of Assembly and Volumes 21/31-21/49 and Volumes 22/01-22/29 for the Senate.
Table 3: Distribution of female members of Parliament

Women’s Performance

As was seen in the previous report, a simple overview would show that there were no marked differences in the attendance of male parliamentarians as compared to female parliamentarians. The average attendance in the House of Assembly was 30.95 (64.5%) for females while that of males was 31.2 (64.9%).15 However, a more nuanced look at the attendance trends across both genders yields interesting results when one looks at the most and least attending members.

House of Assembly

Table 4 (below) juxtaposes the performance of female against male members of the House of Assembly with regard to the highest attendance. The table shows the top five scores. Attendance is measured out of a possible 48 sittings that the House had in the period June 2012-June 2013. As can be seen, there are more males with very high, and some with perfect attendance rates, and only one female achieves an attendance rate similar to the top nine male attenders. In both groups, male and female, the MDC-T members out-performed the MDC, ZANU PF and independent members.

Table 4: Highest attendance in House of Assembly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of MP</td>
<td>Party</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Name of MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matienga M</td>
<td>MDC-T</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>Nezi W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumalo M</td>
<td>MDC-T</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>Mungofa PF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karenyi L</td>
<td>MDC-T</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>Matibe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maposhere D</td>
<td>ZANU PF</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Shoko M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinomona M</td>
<td>ZANU PF</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>Mushonga SL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinyemba M</td>
<td>ZANU PF</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>Nemadzwiwa N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next table (Table 5) juxtaposes the performance of female against male members of the House of Assembly with regard to the lowest attendance. Again, the table shows the lowest scores out of a possible 48 sittings. The figures show that of the male members who attended the least, most of them had very poor attendance rates, with the bottom ten males missing almost all sittings. Although some female members had low attendance rates only one of them dropped below 25%. As the Vice President she performed better than many male members of Parliament without executive positions that could compete with Parliamentary duties. As a collective, women therefore performed remarkably better than men.

Table 5: Lowest attendance in House of Assembly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of MP</td>
<td>Party</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Name of MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makone TM</td>
<td>MDC-T</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Ndlovu MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpanshe P</td>
<td>MDC-T</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Sibanda CC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyoni SGG</td>
<td>ZANU PF</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Nhema CDF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buka F</td>
<td>ZANU PF</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Mlilo OS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muchena ON</td>
<td>ZANU PF</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Moyo JN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mujuru</td>
<td>JT</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Mphozi OM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As pointed out above, the average attendance amongst the women was 30.9 in the House of Assembly and 20.1 in the Senate. The most outstanding female MP in terms of attendance
was Honourable Margaret Matienga of the MDC-T party in the House of Assembly. She attended a record 47 times out of 48 times, scoring a 98% attendance rate. Senator Priscilla Misihairambwi Mushonga of the MDC party attended the least in the Senate, recording a 100% absentee record.16

Participation in Plenary Sessions

Very few women spoke. However compared to the men, the women in the Senate performed better than the men while in the House of Assembly their performance was the same as that of men. Women in the Senate spoke an average 9.7 times compared to men’s 8.0 average. In the House of Assembly, women’s participation was the same as that of the men, speaking an average 6.5 times compared to men’s average 6.4 times. However fewer women, 5 out of 34 (14.7%), never spoke while 45 men out of 176 (25.8%) never spoke.

Participation in the House of Assembly

The 7th Parliament had a total of 34 female members in the House of Assembly. Five of them did not make a single contribution all year.

16 These figures relate only to the period under which the study was done-June 2012 to June 2013. These figures are therefore an indicative sample of performance but do not reflect the holistic picture of the whole five years under which the Seventh Parliament subsisted June 2008-June 2013.
In the Senate, the most outspoken female MPs were Senators Sithembile Mlotshwa of the MDC-T, Senator Thokozile Mathuthu and Senator Minah Mandaba both from ZANU PF who spoke 23, and 22 times respectively throughout the year. The female MP who spoke the least was Senator Priscilla Misihairambwi Mushonga; who never spoke in her capacity as a Senator because she never attended. However she did participate in a constitutional debate in the House of Assembly in her capacity as the Minister of Regional Integration and International Cooperation.

In the House of Assembly, Honourable Theresa Makone of the MDC-T party was the most outstanding, speaking 24 times. A number of MP’s did not do so well. These included Honourables Flora Buka, Dorcus Maposhere, Rosemary Goto and Metrine Mudau of ZANU PF who never spoke even though they attended a number of seatings.

The performance of the women differed along political party affiliation lines. In the House of Assembly, women from MDC-T spoke 9 times on average as opposed to women from ZANU PF who spoke half as often (4.4 times). This difference was also found in the Senate where women from MDC-T spoke 12 times on average as opposed to 9.4 times for women from ZANU PF.

Regrettable as it is that most women were not participating, it is crucial to note that women’s silence in the Seventh Parliament is difficult to explain. Ordinarily, silence would be attributable to a number of factors that generally inhibit women’s participation in public discourse such as “discriminatory political structures as well as economic and cultural barriers which prevent women’s full participation in decision-making processes.” The negative effects of these structures and attitudes do not suddenly disappear from the male and female parliamentarians’ psyche when they sit in Parliament, hence, even at that level, women are afraid to voice their opinions and to speak boldly on technical matters as much as the men in Parliament.

However, in this study, key women politicians, quite senior in their parties and with considerable political clout also did not participate as much as one would expect them to. These women include Honourables Flora Buka, Oppah Muchinguri, Olivia Muchena and Biata Nyamupinga of ZANU PF and Lucia Matibenga of MDC-T who spoke under 5 times in the period June 2012 to June 2013.

---

Thematic interests discussed by Female MPs

Female Parliamentarians spoke on a variety of subjects, not just the usual stereotyped ‘women-centric’ issues.

Significantly, in this study when women spoke it was not in relation to stereotyped issues. The UN General Recommendation 23/97 states that;

“Stereotyping, including that perpetrated by the media, confines women in political life to issues such as the environment, children and health, and…"
Zimbabwean female parliamentarians did not conform to any stereotypes. When they spoke, it was in relation to a variety of issues. These included the treatment of female prisoners, women’s participation in decision-making, politically motivated violence against women, citizenship, the constitution making process and human rights including the right to health.

In the Senate, Senator Alice Chimbudzi of ZANU PF spoke advocating for female only prisons. She also expressed her hope for the implementation of instruments that recognise the role of women in commerce, industry and political circles. Senator Agnes Sibanda of MDC-T expressed her hope for the elevation of women to positions of leadership the same way that South Africa elevated Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma and rallied behind her election as the first female Chairperson of the African Union.

In the House of Assembly Honourable Biata Nyamupinga of ZANU PF condemned political violence arguing that it dissuaded women from actively engaging in politics. She also stated that the police should investigate and bring the perpetrators to book. Honourable Dorcas Staff Sibanda of MDC-T also condemned political violence, stating that the targets of such violence were women and she hoped, justice against the perpetrators of violence would be ensured. Honourable Evelyn Masaiti of MDC-T added her voice to the discussion on violence stating that the Women’s Caucus had resolved to desist from violence. Honourable Anastacia Ndlovu of ZANU PF lamented how women were predominantly the targets of such violence and hoped for a change in ensuing elections.

In relation to health, Honourable Tabitha Khumalo of the MDC-T emerged as a champion of the right to health. She specifically mentioned the challenges that women were facing at United Bulawayo Hospital. She also spoke to the challenges brought by the pricing of cotton to the production of sanitary wear for women arguing that if cotton prices were too low, farmer refused to produce or to sell their cotton then women would not have any sanitary wear, affecting women’s reproductive health. Honourable Lynette Karenyi of MDC-T also raised the question of maternity fees; whether women should pay these fees with Deputy Prime Minister Thokozani Khupe of MDC-T. Honourable Khupe responded stating that women should not pay maternity fees but due to challenges in distributing funds to support hospitals, women were still paying. Honourable Editor Matamisa of MDC-T raised a question with the Minister of Health concerning the policy relating to the assistance of cancer patients. The Minister of Health and Child Welfare Dr Madzorera explained that government has started revitalising treatment in Zimbabwe at Parirenyatwa hospital in Harare and Mpilo hospital in Bulawayo hence free treatment was not yet a possibility.

Honourable Lucia Matibenga of the MDC-T contributed towards the technical budget analysis for the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development. She explained how the Medium Term Plan of the Budget prioritised women’s empowerment,

---


12 | P a g e
paying particular attention to the 80% of women; living in the communal areas. She however bemoaned the inadequacy of the funds allocated to the Ministry of Women’s Affairs in executing key priority projects such as the national gender based violence Strategy and gender mainstreaming.

Significantly, however in the Senate, a male Senator, Patrick Chinamasa of ZANU PF emerged as a champion of women’s rights. He tackled a number of issues pertaining to the advancement of women including the alignment of criminal sentences to gendered crimes such as rape to reflect the gravity of the crime and gave the specific example of the inconsistency between the sentence for rape and that for property theft. He also urged the domestication of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.19

The debate around the constitution making process was rich and female MPs were very engaged. The following table illustrates the issues that women MPs raised.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of MP</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessie Majome</td>
<td>MDC-T</td>
<td>Mentioned that the new Constitution would make a difference in women’s lives; Happy with equality clauses guaranteeing equality between men and women and ensuring the treatment of women as equal citizens; Paid tribute to the women who had sacrificed their time, energy and in some cases lives to ensure that Zimbabwe got a new constitution; Mentioned Christen Mandizvidza, a Harare woman who was killed during the COPAC process at Mai Musodzi Hall in Mbare in September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla Misihairambwi Mushonga</td>
<td>MDC</td>
<td>Stated that the Constitution was a historic achievement that would bring change into women’s lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia Muchena</td>
<td>ZANU PF</td>
<td>Appreciated the participatory approach adopted in the constitution-making process and hoped citizens would vote in their numbers during the Referendum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynette Karenyi</td>
<td>MDC-T</td>
<td>Pleased with provisions - bringing security sector under scrutiny - on citizenship that enable women to pass citizenship to their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa Makone</td>
<td>MDC-T</td>
<td>Emphasised the need for public education on the contents of the Constitution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Zinyemba</td>
<td>ZANU PF</td>
<td>Commended the unity of purpose around constitution-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorcas Staff Sibanda</td>
<td>MDC-T</td>
<td>Pleased with provisions in the Constitution - protecting women from domestic violence; - providing for a gender commission, enabling devolution; - inclusion of children’s rights and health as a human right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sithembiso Nyoni</td>
<td>ZANU PF</td>
<td>Hoped for the implementation of the Constitution, Hoped for true peace in the nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppah Muchinguri</td>
<td>ZANU PF</td>
<td>Emphasised the need for gender equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Matienga</td>
<td>MDC-T</td>
<td>Happy with the inclusion of the right to education, right to health, recognition of many official languages, the rights of the elderly and the women’s citizenship rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Mahoka</td>
<td>ZANU PF</td>
<td>Happy with inclusion of rights of combatants, war collaborators, ex detainees, happy with the proportional representation element</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19 Hansard Volume 22 No 16.
Female Ministers and Parliament

At the onset, it is worth repeating the observation from the previous report that Ministers have the dual burden of executive and legislative duties, and thus it can be expected that their attendance might be lower than the ordinary members of the House of Assembly or the Senate.

5: Attendance of Female Ministers in Parliament

Attendance of Female Ministers in Parliament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Ministers</th>
<th>Deputy Ministers</th>
<th>Deputy Prime Minister</th>
<th>Vice President</th>
<th>Average Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MDC</td>
<td>Mnangagwa</td>
<td>Mutsvangwa Morica</td>
<td>Nyoni Sithembiso</td>
<td>Buka Flora</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mutsvangwa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mutsvangwa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDC</td>
<td>Mnangagwa</td>
<td>Mutsvangwa Morica</td>
<td>Nyoni Sithembiso</td>
<td>Buka Flora</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mutsvangwa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mutsvangwa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

None of the female Ministers attended Parliament an average 50%. Hon Priscilla Msharairambwi recorded zero attendance in the period under review (June 2012 - June 2013).

Infographic by Natasha Msonza

As can be seen from the Table above there were 7 female ministers, 2 female deputy ministers, 1 female deputy prime minister and 1 female vice president in the duration of the

---

20 Attendance relates to their physical presence at sittings of the House of Parliament to which they were elected. Under the old Constitution, individuals only became Ministers if they were elected as MPs and so attendance signifies a representation of the constituencies that elected them.
Seventh Parliament. Of these 5 were from ZANU PF, 6 from MDC-T and 1 from the MDC. None of the female ministers attended Parliament an average 50%.

**Milestone achievements of the women in the Seventh Parliament**

The major milestone achievement for women in the Seventh Parliament was the inclusion of provisions that seek to achieve gender equality within all spheres of life in the new Constitution. These provisions included.\(^{21}\)

- provisions that ensure women do not lose their Zimbabwean citizenship through marriage or the dissolution of marriage;
- provisions relating to the prohibition of all forms of discrimination including gender discrimination on many grounds, whether the discrimination is direct or indirect and whether it comes by way of denial of a privilege or advantage or through a condition, restriction or imposed disability;
- provisions for recognition of socio economic rights including environmental rights, access to agricultural land, education, health-care, food and water;
- provisions on the specific application of the rights of vulnerable groups including women which provisions are useful in addressing the specific ways in which such vulnerable groups experience the violation of generally protected rights and emphasise the areas where protection is required the most; and
- provisions requiring that gender balance is considered in the appointment of Ministers and Deputy Ministers, in the representation of women in Parliament, and in judicial appointments.\(^{22}\)

**Conclusions**

Without disregarding the contributions made by female parliamentarians in the last year of the Seventh Parliament, women’s representation and participation in Parliament could be improved. Just like their male counterparts, women’s contributions were few particularly in the public sessions. The inability of women to participate could have been a result of the structure of the political space in which these women operated as well as their limited numbers. As mentioned earlier, only 18.8% representation of both Houses were women. These women had faced many prejudices and challenges to be elected into Parliament including; gender discrimination and marginalisation, fear of intimidation and violence, the unavailability of funds to sponsor campaigns, traditional and cultural barriers, family responsibilities (which the males rarely are burdened with), and political party structures.\(^{23}\)

Having faced these challenges, their election and inclusion into the legislature was but the beginning of unseating years of male domination in law and policy making. Karam and

\(^{21}\)ZWLA, *Gender Audit of COPAC Draft Constitution*, 17

\(^{22}\) These provisions were blatantly disregarded by the President post 31\(^{st}\) July 2013 election where he appointed on three women in cabinet of 26. See The Herald, ‘President Mugabe Appoints Cabinet’ available at www.herald.co.zw/breakingnews-president-mugabe-set-to-announce-cabinet/.

\(^{23}\) Dube R, *Ratification, Rhetoric and Rare Implementation of international and regional standards on women’s right to participate in decision making. If adopted, will the new Constitution change anything.* Sokwanele. P.14-16.
Lovenduski argue that “Parliaments were established, organised and dominated by men, acting in their own interest and establishing procedures for their own convenience,” and the female parliamentarians were not spared the trials of this construction. They entered a space that already reflected male biases, which Karam and Lovenduski call “institutional masculinity,” and had to work to change the political culture.

**Is it necessary to have more female representatives in Parliament?**

Karam makes a six-pronged argument why women should be represented in decision-making which aptly qualifies why in Zimbabwe we need more female members of Parliament. These arguments are;

- The justice argument - that women constitute half the population;
- The democracy argument - that democracy is only possible if both sexes are represented;
- The critical mass argument - that a conscious population is possible where views of all sexes are fully expressed;
- The differential experiences argument - that both sexes’ life experiences are different and should be so represented;
- The interest argument - that both sexes have different interests and desires and these should be allowed to be articulated differently; and
- The symbolic argument - that the presence of key women leaders inspires other women to take up the same roles.

The development of laws and policies and decision-making by men alone reflects only part of human experience and potential. That is why it is important for women’s voices to be heard in key decision making bodies such as Parliament. It also takes these women working together, very hard, and with the single minded purpose of representing women’s concerns and transforming their male counterparts’ attitudes, for gender equality to be realised. Should the women be polarised along political lines, then they tend to be less effective. Zimbabwean female politicians should therefore come together to represent women’s interests, above party interests and any other factors that could weaken their collective efforts to improve the situation of women in Zimbabwe.


Acknowledgements

2. Albert Maipisi (Parliament): Access to the Hansard
3. Chiwoniso (Parliament): Access to the Register
4. Lindani Chirambadare (Intern at RAU): Data Capturing and research assistance
5. Kudakwashe Chitsike and Tony Reeler (Staff at RAU): Editing
6. Natasha Msonza (Staff at RAU): Editing, layout and design including infographics
7. Alix Dunn (The Engine Room): for assistance designing the Infographs and brainstorming indicators of performance
8. Emma Prest and Gabi Sibley (Tactical Technology Collective): Assistance designing the Infographs
9. Infogr.am: Free pass access to online designing tool