

**POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN
IN NAMIBIA SINCE INDEPENDENCE**

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ABSTRACT

The study focused on Political Empowerment of Women in Namibia since Independence. Therefore, the study will focus on the national level, because that is where the necessary interventions can be initiated.

At independence, the Namibian government was confronted with the task of redressing issues of inequality, not only amongst the different races within the country, but also in terms of gender. Namibian traditional cultures, as well as colonial history, neglected and oppressed women in many ways- to the point that until independence women were treated as minors. This state of affairs affected women's status in society. This study was conducted to determine whether this dismal state of affairs has changed since independence or not.

The Republic of Namibia adopted a Gender Neutral Constitution. Article 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia states that "all persons shall be equal before the law and that no person shall be discriminated against on the grounds of sex." The Constitution therefore creates an enabling environment for attaining gender balance in the country.

It is important that political parties should therefore take the lead in leveling the playing field for women, by making space for women to participate equally in politics and educate men to share equally in housework and the raising of the children. Nonetheless, political parties have made little effort to promote women as leaders within their own ranks and to nominate them as candidates for national election. Political parties tend to blame women for not coming forward as candidates, rather than analysing and removing the many barriers and constraints facing women who enter the male dominated sphere of politics.

Despite that Namibian government is a signatory to various agreements the participation of women in the Namibian political arena is still dismal. This has happened when there are women in leading political positions, and opportunities have been opening up in the light of equal opportunities for all and at a time when more women are being trained in various professions.

The result of this situation is that women in Namibia seem to have neither the same, political support to rise up to leadership positions and nor being availed the new opportunities at the political decision-making level.

This study used qualitative with slightly quantitative techniques of collecting data. The selection of respondents was arbitrarily done. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the following: Sister Namibia, Legal Assistance Centre, political parties, and donor agencies, Parliamentarians and Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare. The information was also collected through, among other sources, reviewing literature and reading annual reports, as well as and examining different types of official documents. This information was supplemented by qualitative information gathered through semi-structured interviews.

One of the objectives of this study was to determine whether or not there are procedures in place that promote women's political empowerment in Namibia and to determine factors that hinder women's political empowerment. Firstly, the study has found that changing laws and government policies alone neither guarantee the protection of women's rights nor remove gender discrimination from all sorts of levels of society. Women have the responsibility to get elected, because women still have to do everything in their power to continue uplifting and emancipating Namibian women, and this can be better achieved if they enjoy people's confidence.

The statistical analysis of the current status of women in elected and appointed decision making bodies are still small minority, particularly at National level. Therefore, policies need to be implemented that emphasise the role and significance of women in decision making. A lot still needs to be done to sensitise both men and women so that they can understand that women are and can be good leaders like men. By so doing, it will be possible for women to come out of their significant invisibility in the decision making structures of all bodies in Namibia.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mother, Meriam Aishe Oyiwa Kaukungwa, for having been a source of inspiration throughout my life. Her selfless attitude and encouragement to be the best I can be, has served me well, and for this, I will always be indebted.

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DECLARATIONS

I hereby declare that this work, entitled “ Political empowerment of women in Namibia since independence “ is my own independent work except where stated otherwise in the acknowledgements or the text, and that it has not been previously submitted in whole or in part for an award at any institution.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women
COD	Congress of Democrats
DAW	Department for the Advancement of Women
DTA	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance
DWA	Department of Women's Affairs in the office of the President
FEMNET	African Women's Development & Communication Network
GRN	Government of the Republic of Namibia
GAD	Gender Training & Research Programme
GNP	Gross National Product
MPs	Members of Parliament
MWACW	The Ministry of Women Affairs & Child Welfare
NA	National Assembly
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
NAWA	Namibian Women's Association
NC	National Council
NDC	Namibian Development Corporation
NPC	National Planning Commission
PLAN	Peoples Liberation Army
PR	Proportional Representation
RWPC	The Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCGU	Southern African Development Community Gender Unit
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
UDF	The United Democratic Front Coalition

UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNAM	University of Namibia
WCI	Women's Campaign International

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Namibia has a long history of many types of social inequality, including gender inequality. Many challenges women face today in Namibia have been influenced by the historical imbalance of power between men and women, social structural factors such as poverty, unemployment and other related problems. The long history of women's participation in politics has been recorded in a number of communities in Namibia. For example, women have been rulers in most of the Kavango communities in the Northeast, as well as in the Ongandjera community in Ovambo. A number of traditional authorities, including the Bondelswart in the South, are led by women today (Becker 1998).

Namibia's history has been one of the suppression, discrimination and disenfranchisement of indigenous populations. This dismal state of affairs severely affected women's status under apartheid. Apartheid laws and social structure tore Namibian families apart, produced widespread social disorganisation and disempowered the women of Namibia. The Contract Labour System, in particular, severely undermined Namibian family structures and negatively impacted women. Apartheid's Roman-Dutch Laws discriminated against women, relegating them to positions of second or third class citizens. Namibia's liberation struggle, although also causing family separation, contributed to the enhancement of women's social and economic status since some women were trained and given the opportunity to enter in professions not available to them under the apartheid regime. Many of the women relating to economic, political, legal and social status in Namibia today are a direct result of discrimination experienced under apartheid (Ipinge & Le Beau 2004:5).

In some pre-colonial societies in Namibia, women held positions of power. Minimally, the social status of women in many Namibian pre-colonial societies derived from their relationship to men. In pre-colonial African societies, women exerted pressure on men both as mothers and as wives. In addition, in some

cultures, such as those of the Nama, Kavango and Owambo, women were traditional leaders and chiefs. Nevertheless, the social, political and economic organisations of these cultures were, and still are, centred on male dominance (Iipinge & LeBeau 2004:1). Although women in most pre-colonial societies were subject to male dominance, the imposition of colonialism, including its manifestation as Apartheid further disempowered them. When Western missionaries and colonial administrators came to Namibia, they insisted on talking, handling official discussions with men in positions of power and refused to deal with women, even in cases where women were leaders. So, in many traditional societies, female leaders allowed their male relatives to act as leaders when dealing with Westerners. Gradually, however, these men took power away from their female relatives. This led to women losing any social position they might have had. Furthermore, many customary laws, whether or not they discriminated against women, were influenced by colonial authorities and used to advance colonial government policies. Many customary laws were profoundly reinterpreted and manipulated by colonial rule. These changes in customary law frequently included Western ideals of male dominance and resulted in discrimination against women (Iipinge & LeBeau 2004:1-2).

According to LeBeau (2001:193) women under Western colonialism had a lower legal and social status than under any other social or political dispensation that has existed in Namibia. For example, at independence, civil law allowed a husband to acquire power over his wife and her property through marriage. This meant that a husband had absolute power over his wife and all property within the marriage, even if the wife had obtained the property before getting married. The wife could not make decisions regarding property without her husband's permission. For instance, she could not buy a house or car, get a bank loan or sign a contract without her husband's consent. Conversely, a husband could make any decision, acquire any property or enter into any contract he wanted to, without his wife's consent. Although legal, social and economic standards are changing, women in Namibia today have not yet obtained full equality with men.

At independence the Namibian government was faced with the task of redressing issues of inequality not only amongst the different races within the country, but also in terms of gender. The colonial apartheid system that Namibia endured for more than three decades was characterised by suppression, discrimination and the disempowerment of the indigenous population. This state of affairs severely affected women's status in society.

Being committed to creating equal opportunities, the Republic of Namibia adopted a Gender Neutral Constitution. Article 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia states that "all persons shall be equal before the law and that no person shall be discriminated against on the grounds of sex." The Constitution therefore creates an enabling environment for attaining gender balance in the country. It states that Parliament may need to take special steps to help women play an equal role in all areas of life in Namibia (Iiping & Mwandangi 2001:8).

Therefore, women's equality is enshrined in the Constitution, which declares that discrimination based on sex is against the law. It also recognises the previously disadvantaged position of women and encourages the implementation of Affirmative Action Policies which advance women's social status and roles within society (Iiping & LeBeau 1997:26).

Therefore it is important that political parties should take the lead in leveling the playing field for women, by making space for women to participate equally in politics and educate men to share equally in housework and the raising of children.

As a consequence of the legacy of apartheid Namibia is a country with the highest levels of inequalities in wealth and education. Namibian women, although outnumbering their male counterparts, still remain marginalised economically, politically and socially (The Namibian 5 June 1998).

But, for the Namibian economy to prosper the country needs to tap the potential women possess. The private sector should recognise the opportunities for expansion in the development and upgrading of the workforce by promoting the unused and unrecognised potential of women-power. In other words we cannot talk of meaningful empowerment of the previously disadvantaged classes of our society, if women continue to be employed at the lower levels of all structures. If this problem is not attended to, the feminisation of poverty will continue (Ipinge & LeBeau 1997: 26).

Political empowerment is a broad term and therefore, the focus of this study will be on the national level, because that is where the necessary interventions can be initiated.

1.1. BACKGROUND

Namibia was colonised from 1884 to 1915 by Germany and then ruled by Apartheid South Africa under a League of Nations/United Nations mandate until 1990. Namibian women were actively involved both in resistance against colonisation and the struggle against Apartheid, and for national liberation (Becker 1995, Hayes et al 1998). For example, in 1959 women led the resistance to forced removal of the black residents of the Old Location in Windhoek. Pruning to the liberation struggle, some women joined the Peoples Liberation Army (PLAN), whereas many others organised food production and education in the camps, while in exile, and were in charge through the structures of the SWAPO Women's Council.

While the SWAPO Women's Council had initially been formed in order to mobilise women for the struggle for national liberation, during the 1980s the discourse of equality for women was increasingly added to the agenda. For example, during the liberation struggle women also organized themselves within Namibia. The Namibian Women's Voice, mobilised women around issues such as

reproductive health and rights, established income generating projects and provided leadership training (Becker 1995).

After independence women from various political parties and NGOs attempted to form a national women's umbrella organisation to promote women's issue in building a new society. However, this failed due to the country's extremely divided history. It was through the Beijing process in 1994/5 that women priorities in Namibia began to work together across party lines and other divides more successfully.

Since independence in 1990 an increasing number of women have become leaders both in the government as well as in non-governmental and community-based organisations. However, since Beijing the need for gender balance at all levels and all spheres of society has become a matter of national concern in Namibia. As a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, Namibia has committed itself to ensuring equal representation of women and men in the decision making of within the organs of the state and in SADC structures at all levels. The goal has been set of achieving at least a thirty percent target of women in all political and decision-making structures by the year 2005(SADC Gender Declaration 1997).

Nonetheless, political parties have made little effort to promote women as leaders within their own ranks and to nominate them as candidates for national and regional elections. Political parties tend to blame women for not coming forward as candidates, rather than analysing and removing the many barriers and constraints facing women who enter the male dominated sphere of politics.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which parliament ratified in 1992 and the CEDAW Optional Protocol ratified in 2000, as well as the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action, the African Regional Platform for Action and the Optional Protocol to the UN Women's Convention, all of which uphold the principles of gender equality (NPC) 2001: 618; Women Campaign International (WCI) 2003:1, the participation of women in the Namibian political arena is still dismal. For example, in 2004, in Cabinet there are only five women out of a total 19 ministries and two of the three portfolios for these women represent women in gender-stereotyped positions it is only the Minister of Finance who does not hold a traditionally gender-stereotyped portfolio. In the National Assembly, women constitute only 27% of the Members of Parliament (MPs) (Ipinge & Mwandangi 2001:2-3).

The background literature indicates that although women form over 51% of the population their representation in decision-making structures is very low.

This has happened while there are women in leading political positions, and as opportunities have been opening up in the light of equal opportunities for all, and at a time when more women are being trained in various professions.

The result of this situation is that women in Namibia seem to have neither the same political support to rise up to leadership positions nor being availed the new opportunities at the political decision-making level. It is indicated in the WCI (2003:9) report that some leaders suggest that women should adopt a community and local level approach, rather than only a national level, to increasing women's participation in power-sharing by first effecting change at the local level. This approach was thought to be useful because political parties did not view local level government as an area of power and would therefore be less resistant to women sharing power in the men at the local level. Furthermore, advocates of

this policy have argued that change at the local level might be better received by the public and that women could more easily become entrenched in the structure of government at the local level (WCI 2003:10).

This may indicate that the empowerment of women, through taking up various political leadership positions and seizing the opportunities available, has not been adequate. It appears that the empowerment process does not support the empowerment policies accepted by the state. These include the accepting mechanisms that recognise the role of women in the political development of the society.

1.3. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research is to determine:

- Whether or not there are adequate procedures in place that promote women's political empowerment in Namibia.
- Factors that hinder women's political empowerment.
- Whether these procedures enable women to rise to leadership positions and opportunities in conformity with equal opportunities for all.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What mechanisms are in place to promote women empowerment?
- What factors hinder women's political empowerment?
- What procedures enable women to rise to leadership positions?
- Are there equal opportunities for all (both men and women)?

1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- The study might be significant to the policy makers in Namibia, in that it might reveal the real situation experienced by women despite the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which parliament ratified in 1992; and the CEDAW Optional Protocol ratified in 2000, as well as the the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development; the Beijing Platform for Action; the African Regional Platform for Action and the Optional Protocol to the UN Women's Convention in Africa. Policy makers might use these findings to identify the causes for women's political marginalisation. The findings might also be of importance to other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that are pursuing a similar path toward women's political empowerment. The findings might serve as guidelines for effective policy formulation and implementation.
- Both Private and Non-Governmental Organisations devoted to improve women's position might be sensitised on the invisible gender relations in Namibia that are likely to undermine their effort. The study will provide relevant approaches that will lead to the successful implementation of their programs without being hindered by unequal women's political representation.

1.6 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Political empowerment of women, as eluded earlier is a broad term. The study has not include Regional and Local government, a significant sector in Namibia. This placed some limitations on the measurement of impact, given the importance of these other spheres of decision-making in the delivery chain. The study has also confined it self to SADC countries in terms of

drawing lessons from their experiences, and this is also due to limited time available.

1.7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines qualitative / quantitative research methods and data collection instruments. Research methodology is the way of collecting data and the processing thereof within the framework of the research process. Two methodologies of collecting data can be distinguished, qualitative and quantitative methods.

1.7.1 QUANTITATIVE/QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

This study used quantitative with some measure of slightly qualitative techniques of collecting data. The basic instruments applied by this study include, among others, interviews, literature search and structured questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. This research tool was used in order to enable the researcher to study a phenomenon or understand purposely selected respondents' behaviour, personality and motives. The aim of these interviews was to make respondents express their personal experiences and attitudes, which are relevant to the problem under discussion. In this particular case, the Political Empowerment of Women in Namibia since Independence. These methods allowed the researcher to access personal information that would not have been possible by using other methods.

For a good research design, the study adopted an interview approach and the following people have been interviewed:

- Officials in management positions, from the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare
- Sister Namibia Collective
- Legal Assistance
- Donor Agencies

- Women's organizations
- Political Parties, such as: The South West Africa People's Organisations (SWAPO), because it is the ruling party, the Congress of Democrats (COD), because it is a recently formed political party and it is represented in Parliament. Democratic Turnhalle Alliances (DTA) is the official opposition party.
- Gender Training & Research Programme (GTRP) of University of Namibia (UNAM).
- Members of Parliament.

1.7.2 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Effective research requires research instruments or resources. The information was also collected through, among other sources, reviewing literature and reading annual reports, as well as and examining different types of official documents.

Of the 60 questionnaires were distributed, 47 were received back. Respondents arbitrarily selected. Problems were encountered during data gathering, inter alia; some respondents were not willing to respond, while others took a longer time to respond then planned for.

1.8 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The paper is organized in five chapters. Chapter one is an introductory chapter, which deals with the background, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, scope and limitations of the study, significance of the study and research methodology. Chapter two provides the conceptual and analytical framework or literature review. Chapter three deals with comparative studies of SADC countries when it comes to political empowerment of women. Chapter four is the presentation and analysis of data. Chapter five is the concluding chapter, which gives the conclusion of the study and possible policy recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Overview

Given the dynamics of women's representation in the political decision making sphere, one cannot employ the concepts of Empowerment, Political Empowerment, Gender, Democracy, Participation and Emancipation without defining them.

2.2 EMPOWERMENT

For the purpose of this study it is a multidimensional and interlinked process of change in power relations. Many different definition of empowerment show that it is an elusive concept and that defining it is difficult.

- **Power within:** enabling women to articulate their own aspirations and strategies for change;
- **Power to:** enabling women to develop the necessary skills and access the necessary resources to achieve their aspirations;
- **Power with:** enabling women to examine and articulate their collective interest, to organize themselves to achieve and to inter link with other women's and men's organisations for change;
- **Power over:** changing the underlying inequalities in power and resources which constrain women's aspirations and their ability to achieve them (Hafez 2001).

In this study, power relates to the women's liberating and enabling experiences, thus a distinction is made between *power over* (which is control), where power is used in role enactment in the public or formal realms; and *power to* (ability), which is personal dignified power, giving a sense of internal strength. The individuals require not only the right to determine their choices in life, but also the right to influence the direction of social change. In

relation to political representation, the involvement of women as political representatives concedes *power over* (authoritative power) to these women, thus making them members of the control machinery, yet without power to (which it is in the interest of this study to argue), this power is redundant power. Often patriarchal ideologies and structures have reinforced and perpetuated power of men over women. Hence in the women liberation struggles, *power to* is crucial. For even when women possess power over, it may be shunted to the side by their personal power values and beliefs. In practice, the two forms of power cannot be distinctively delineated, as both reinforce and give meaning to each other. For example, with *power to*, women may be inactive when they are socially ostracised. In the same vein, women with *power over* could lack dignified personal power and the will to act, and thus be susceptible to manipulation (Hafez 2001:81).

In relation to women's struggles, power from the perspectives of the dominated points to weaknesses and strengths. Hafez (2001) refers to women's power models as *power to*, which is the ability to affect change, and that of men as *power over*, oriented to dominating and influencing others. For women, changes mean involving themselves in both formal (to get power that is legitimated) and informal structures (that may allow for self-determination) and thus empowering themselves as changes are effected in the power relations, to strengthen the weak.

In this study, empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Besides this process is actions, which both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organisational and institutional contexts, which govern the use of these assets.

Empowered people have freedom of choice and action. This in turn enables them to better influence the course of their lives and the decisions which affect them.

Empowerment involves having control over their lives and bodies, plus the ability to gain access to control over the allocation of crucial material and non-material resources. Power could be political, social and economic, and legitimised through the possession of these instruments. It is neither monolithic, nor concentric, diffusing into society.

Empowerment in its broadest sense refers to an individual's or group's increased "power". In other words, it refers both to internal change within an individual's sense of self and autonomy, and external change in social status and basic power relationships in society.

Carr et al (1996) argued that any strategy, which deals with the empowerment of the poor, and with women's empowerment in particular, must be, based on an understanding of and ability to overcome the lack of power, which lie behind it. However, she noted that the term is still a relatively recently developed concept and remains under-defined. She pointed to the debate as to what empowerment comprises and how best it can be achieved. According to her, the central question that empowerment seeks to answer is: what are the causes of the subordination or oppression of specific powerless groups (women)? To obtain answers to this question she provides three suggestions:

- (i) Focus on patriarchy as an overarching gender or kinship system, which determines women's roles and relationships.
- (ii) Focus on a single (or primary) domain of women's powerlessness, most commonly the household or workplace and its relationship with giving rise to women's reproductive roles.
- (iii) Assume that women experience subordination or powerlessness in multiple domains, either simultaneously or sequentially.

According to Kabeer (1994; 1-2), gender sensitisation has been one of the various approaches used by African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET). In the book 'The Road to Empowerment' the authors provide us with a wide range of knowledge on how gender sensitisation at all levels of society has been useful for women's promotion of gender awareness to different stakeholders including policy makers and implementing agencies, for the purpose of promoting gender awareness and empowerment of women. The authors argue that "it is our belief that the process of understanding yourself and your environment, why you behave the way you do, is the first step towards empowerment". The process of sensitisation and gender training was seen as a step on the road to empowerment of the individual and for those the individual would come into contact with, as they put it. It is true that efforts on sensitisation have to a certain extent contributed to changing attitudes towards the role of women in some African societies. However, a lot remains to be done to change people's attitudes towards women's participation in the political arena.

According to Kabeer (1994), empowerment cannot be reduced to a single aspect of process or outcome. How women exercise choice and the actual outcomes will depend on the individual. Choices will vary across class, time and space. For example, there are measurement problems in capturing social change because of the unpredictability of human nature. More often, impacts on empowerment perceived by outsiders might not necessary be those most valued by women themselves.

All these definitions are favoured because, they characterise the process as *people centred*, and not a concern for women qua women but as mates with men (seen in the concept people, which is not gendered and dichotomous). The emphasis then is to empower through redistribution of power. There is recognition that the sources of political power are multiple, beginning at the

individual level, through the masses, challenging and being challenged by the dominant values of society. It is a process reflected in and influencing the social spectrum, broad commitment, where and from which women, as a deprived social group will gain both politically and economically. The contention is that since policies are important in directly giving a legal framework to the process under which women are subordinated, the parliament as a policy making body can be used to effect change. Empowerment will take place, if women are involved in defining this legal framework, and when there is space for recognising and developing their own power and strength.

2.3 POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

Political empowerment involves challenging the forms of oppression, and compels millions of people to play a part in their society on terms which are inequitable, or in ways which deny their human rights (Oxfam 1995).

Women's political empowerment should lead to the liberation of men from false value systems and ideologies of oppression. It should lead to a situation where each person can become a whole being regardless of gender, and realise his/her fullest potential to construct a more humane society for all (Alchitar 1992:40 cited in Bridge Development Report).

According to Mawaya (1999), political empowerment implies the creation of an enabling environment where individuals can fully use their capabilities to take of their lives. Political empowerment also implies the building or acquiring of capacity to accomplish certain tasks and attain specific goals.

In the area of women's political empowerment, it is increasingly becoming recognized that women should both political empower themselves and "be empowered". This relates both to individual (such as increasing individual civic competencies) and collective political empowerment (such as networking).

Political empowerment also involves creating a conducive environment so that women can use these competencies to address the fundamental problems of society at par with their male counterparts.

From this multi-dimensional definition one can deduce that political empowerment implies an increase of consciousness. It implies more than a forced change of power in which there is a destruction of previous structures and values. Political empowerment is a social process that helps people to gain control over their own, and it is very important for women to access this opportunity.

It is my submission that political empowerment is not only about opening up access to decision-making, but it must also include processes that lead people to perceive themselves as being able and entitled to occupy the decision-making space. It is also important that political empowerment of women is a fundamental step towards the eradication of poverty, it yielded positive results where they are given opportunity in decision making.

Political empowerment seems to be a modern idea that would not have been possible 200 years ago before the idea of democracy or government of the people, for the people, by the people was something that was universally accepted.

In the 20th century we saw many examples of political empowerment, led by people such as Nelson Mandela, Sam Nujoma, Julius Nyelele ,etc.

Today there are still many, however, who are disillusioned with democracy. The ability to cast a single vote every 4 to 6 years and help to change the government or the president can seem an inadequate expression of the beliefs that we hold and wish to express and exercise day by day. We are given power to choose our politicians, only to hand it back to them.

Political empowerment is a multi-faceted issue. In many societies across the globe, citizens have little or no influence on national policy making. Political empowerment enables those voices silenced by highly flawed democratic processes to be heard.

According to Minister Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah when it comes to decision making and power sharing, women are still in a transition period. Women have achieved a lot. But there is still a long way to go to emancipate women, empower them and liberate people's minds so that a more favourable atmosphere for women's involvement politics is created (The Namibian, 9 September 2004).

In general, the criteria for women's development include participation in decision making processes, as well the creation of an awareness among women that may be entitled to occupy decision-making space in the public sphere.

Political empowerment is a combination of women's increased economic activity and control over income resulting from access to micro finance, and improved skills, mobility, and access to knowledge and support networks. Status within the community is also enhanced.

2.4 GENDER

Groverman and Gurung (2001:10) define gender as consisting of the roles, responsibilities, rights, relationship, and identities of men and women that are defined or ascribed to them within a given society and context.

According to Iiping et al (2000:2) gender is a socially give attribute or roles and activities connected to being feminine and masculine in a given social grouping. Both femininity and masculinity are constructed from roles women and men are assigned, the expectations which society has of women and men based on sexes. While there are some similarities in what is feminine and masculine across some societies, these similarities are culturally bound or culturally specific and

temporarily or historically and politically determined. Gender identify is derived from (sex) biological script whether born male or female for example. The idea or expectation is that female is weak and male is strong.

Gender is defined as a culturally and socially constructed identity ascribed to male and female (MWACW,1997;5).

This implies that the concept of gender is a social construct that differentiates women and men socially and culturally, and it is not based on biological differences. Women tend to be excluded or disadvantaged in these relations, efforts to redress the balance have more often focused on women. However, a mistake early on in development cooperation was to often focus on women exclusively, rather than on the social relationships in which they are embedded.

Gender is a difficult concept to understand particularly from an African cultural context where there is still considerable confusion as to what the concept means. Njiro (1999) views gender as concept that highlights the unequal relations between females and males, which are constructed socially, culturally, politically and economically. Power relations between the sexes lead to differentiated access to resources and opportunities at the household, community, national and international settings.

Gender equity in African culture is kept by a series of checks and balances most of which are now collapsed or are in a state as modernisation and westernisation have taken over most of the indigenous African culture. Gender is however a dynamic concept, which like culture varies from one social group to another. Gender patterns change over time and they can change rapidly during a crisis period.

Gender as a term describes the characteristics of females and males, which are socially determined in contrast to those which are biologically determined. This

concept is one classification, which like race and religion is used by society to divide people and discriminate against some of them. The essential difference between sex and gender is that sex is the physical and biological difference between men and women. Therefore, gender is an ideology by people about what is female or male, feminine and masculine behaviour as prescribed by society where a person grows. Gender is all the ideas, practices, behaviour and attitudes we learn by imitating those around ones experiences.

Gender in general and in this paper in particular does not refer to women or men per se, but to relations between them, both perceptual and material and the way these are socially constructed. People are born of different sexes and are taught what is appropriate behaviour and attitudes, roles and activities for them and how they should relate other people. This learned behaviour is what makes gender identity and determines gender roles. This is because gender roles are not always the same in all societies. They vary according to different societies, cultures and environments and at different times in history. Thus as society change what is expected of females and males changes and age, race and class also affect what is expected of each gender.

Whilst women have primarily taken the lead in fighting for gender to be placed at the heart, rather than in the margins, of development thinking and practice- men have also played a role in this process. This includes men's organizations that advocate women's right and gender equality, and male gender advocates within development cooperation agencies. It is necessary to broaden the support and participation of men in order to strengthen this process. The pursuit of gender equality is in everyone's interest and is both women's and men's responsibility.

2.5 DEMOCRACY

According to Morna (2004:26) democracy is about the fair representation of all interest groups in society. Women are still under-represented in political

positions. Women have a right to equal participation in political decision-making, whether they make a difference or not.

The meaning and practice of *democracy* has varied through the ages. Its original meaning was appropriate with to the organisation of politics in the Greek city-states. Here, democracy was tied to the concept of citizenship whereby non-citizens were not expected to participate in politics. As citizenship was broadened to include many people, democratic practices changed. One definition involves participatory democracy where people are required to take part in national activities; another one is popular democracy when the members of a community participate in deciding the affairs of their society and/or representative democracy a case where the above two would practically impossible.

In most cases variations of all the three have been merged. An emancipatory approach by representation requires a fair relationship between the represented and representatives. If the represented are to be assured of getting their needs addressed, they need to get people who identify with their values in positions of representation. In situations where personal involvement is practically impossible, this can only be predicted upon a democratic process of selection, where the represented are given chance to elect and/or influence the placing of whom to represent them.

Democracy ,literally means power of the people (combining the Greek words demos, meaning “ the people,” and kratien, meaning to “to rule”).It is usually used to describe a political system where the legitimacy of exercising power stems from the consent of the people. Accordingly, a democratic polity is often identified by the existence of constitutional government, where the power of the leaders is checked and restrained; representative institutions based on free elections, which provide a procedural framework for the delegation of power by the people, competitive parties, in which the ruling majority respects and

guarantees the rights of minorities; and civil liberties, such as freedoms of speech, press, association, and religion. (www.indiana.edu/ipe/glossy.html).

Democracy is also participation by the mass people in the decisions that shape their lives; government by majority rule, with recognition of the rights of minorities; freedom of speech, press, and assembly; freedom to form opposition political parties and run for office; commitment to individual dignity and to equal opportunities for the people to develop their full potential. (www.ptvincivilsociety.org/glossary.htm).

According to Darey (1987), democracy is about a government *of the people, for the people, and by the people*. In other words, democracy is the system which allows the people to change their rulers in a peaceful manner and one in which the government is given the rights to rule because the people say it may. He further contends that freedom and democracy are often used interchangeably, but the two are not synonymous. Democracy is indeed a set of ideas and principles about freedom, but it also consists of a set of practices and procedures that have been molded over time. In short, democracy is the institutionalisation of freedom.

This study defines democracy a system of ruler where people/women are masters of their destiny, being both the leaders and the led, thus the government should serve the interests of women, who in turn benefit from the system. Thus, the government becomes the main channel of communication between the rulers and the ruled. In reality, the definition becomes deceptive as one begins to consider its implications. It is possible for example, to have *a people* that can be called *the people*, who by implication have not similar but the same needs over time and across the diverse and complex social settings?

To make democracy a reality, therefore, requires not the factual information on inherited ideas presented as given, settled and accepted, but intellectual methods by which to discover, and reliably establish them (rejecting absolutes), and thus

cultivating flexibility and tolerance. A democratic culture, hence, requires from its members a capacity to adapt to diverse circumstances and to cooperate as equal-women with men, men with women- in the various spaces. Thus people need to be trained in habits of free and constant inquiry in capacities to learn quickly, and in attitudes of social fellow feeling and cooperation. A case where attention is given to the atmosphere of the polity avoiding the creation of dependence, and yet laying emphasis on the desire for change.

Democracy is not only about *being there* but also contributing to change. It is not just the presence of women that will center their views, experiences, perspectives, interest, aspirations and values, but rather their effective participation (Morna 2004:34).

The participation of women at all levels of decision making in all spheres of society is crucial for the development of democracy and the substantive democracy without the equal participation of women.

However, women in Namibia are currently under-represented at every level of government, particularly at the national and regional levels.

2.6 PARTICIPATION

It is imperative that discussions about women's political empowerment agenda cannot be complete without engaging with the concept of *participation*. Esman and Uphoff (1984) defines participation as an influence on the decision-making process at all levels of special activity and social institutions, and as a means of collective action by various segments of the population or interest groups, with a public measure to stimulate or channel such action.

As mentioned in the earlier definitions, democracy is not only about *being there* but also involves to change. It is not just the presence of women, their will center

their views, interest, experiences, perspectives, aspirations and values but rather their effective participation. Representation and participation in decision-making allows for the of voices to be heard, experiences and values to be centred and for citizens to take responsibility for, and change their own lives (Morna 2004:34).

Participation in the democratic process should not begin and end with casting a ballot. There are a variety of options for civil society groups and individuals to bring their views before parliamentarians. Women's equal participation in decision making is not also be seen as a necessary conditions for women's interest to be taken into account. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision making will provide a balance that more accurately the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning.

According to the World Bank (1994), participation is a process through which stakeholders' influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources which affect them. This definition emphasizes exerting influences and sharing control of key aspects of the development process.

Participation may be viewed as both an end in itself and a means of accomplishing other goals. Participation taps into the physical, economic and social resources of grassroots populations, including the poor, in order to achieve programme objectives. As a result, participation contributes to the processes of democratisation and collaboration over time causes local participation to benefit more directly from development initiatives. It also increases project effectiveness when the mobilization of local resources, the creation of local organisations and the empowerment of local actors enhance project implementation.

This definition limits participation to special activities and institutions, which are not specified. Thus the nature of women involvement is not clarified. In practice, however, the process may take three forms, thus popular, community, and grass-

root level participation. In most instances, popular and women participation have been confused. The latter denotes the direct involvement of ordinary women in the local affairs especially as implementers, where local communities are directed to act on policies conceived by experts.

This has been emphasized over the former because it is both easy to initiate, and its effects are easy to demonstrate. The former, on the other hand, concerns broad issues of social development and the creation of opportunities for the involvement of women in the political, economic and social life of a nation. It is thus concerned with institution building, where women take an active part in deciding on matters that concern their welfare. This is of special importance for the emancipation and empowerment of women, for it means women gain the ability to define critically their problems, and search for solutions.

2.7 EMANCIPATION

This concept is usually used as a synonym for equal rights, yet it encompasses all aspects of liberation, equal rights and opportunities. From a women's perspective, it characterises the extension from the legal equality position in society (outside the home and the family), beyond legal reforms, to the actual end of discrimination against women within the home. It is a quest into exploitation by the family, with the community both in the locality, and at work. It looks at the social, cultural, political and religious issues that over-burden women in order to maintain the dominant modes of production/reproduction.

The challenge is a look into the biological notions of gender femininity and masculinity, for fight against discrimination for emancipation and liberation from all forms of oppression by the state, society and men. Emancipation is abroad commitment to an agenda that goes beyond equality. It is more than just saying no, reacting, refusing and resisting. It implies social creativity, the creation of new values and aims, new forms of cooperation and action. Women's liberation

theories and radical feminists use the word to mean liberation as opposed to emancipation, giving it a dynamic, proactive and transformative stance, in which women can be free from restrictions, as opposed to being free to act. The emphasis here is on collective, as opposed to individual efforts, with a stress on participation, rather than representation. Women's involvement as representatives of their gender should enable and liberate women from the forces that disadvantage them, and guarantee that power over (which representatives of domination/subordination are implicated. Thus, it is based on socially sanctioned intimidation and invites active and passive resistance. It is backed up with power to (ability to use their presence). The women's presence in the legislature should mean that they select the women representatives themselves, retain the right of recall so that even when they are not in the legislature, they influence the actions of the representatives. In practical terms, women's presence in the legislature could empower them.

The experience of other societies has shown that the emancipation of women is not a by-product of a struggle for democracy, national liberation or socialism. It has to be addressed in its own right within our organization, the mass democratic movement and in the society as a whole.

The manipulation of gender relations has been an important feature of state control over, especially, the African people and the effects have impinged most harshly upon women. Their mobility has been rigidly controlled, and the unpaid labour of African women in the rural areas has underpinned the migrant labour system and subsidized the profits of the mining industry.

CHAPTER THREE: WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

3.1 OVERVIEW

In 2004 21 out of 72 members of the National Assembly (NA) were women represents 27%, while in the National Council (NC) there were two women out of 26 Members of Parliament (MPs) represents 8%. At independence the proportion of women in the NA was 8%. Overall in parliament (NA and NC) combined women occupied 22 % of seats.

In 2002 an Inter-Parliamentary Union report ranked Namibia 23rd in the world for the proportion of women representatives in parliament. In Africa only Mozambique, South Africa and Rwanda outperformed Namibia. Although the level of women in the NA was 27% by 2004 (almost reaching the SADC target), this did not translate into a similar proportion of women in the executive. In 2004 only five women were full members of a 26-strong Cabinet (19%).

With regard to legislation, the Namibian situation is clear in terms of gender equality. However, there is a need to put these policies into action. Practical effort towards engendering the political decision-making are demonstrated by the appointment of women in key positions in the country.

At the rate of progress between 1990 and 2004, the Namibian Women's Manifesto estimated that gender balance in top decision-making positions would only be achieved in 2050.

3.2 Political Processes and Women's Empowerment

Over the last decade, Southern Africa has witnessed an unprecedented wave of political democratisation, the settler colonialism that led to wars of liberation. In

Southern Africa, there is a far closer correlation between the level of women's representation in politics and the existence of social revolutions, as opposed to the country's level of economic development (Morna 2004:52).

Of the ten Africa countries with the highest representation of women in parliament, eight countries (including five from Southern Africa), such as Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda Eritrea, Zimbabwe and Namibia have recently undergone liberation wars. Upheavals of this kind shake existing social and cultural norms, even if only for a short period of time, opening a space for women to play non-traditional roles (Morna 2004:52).

Despite these changes, issues of gender and democracy have only recently come to the fore. The painful struggles for independence in Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia provided some impetus for exploring the double and often triple discrimination borne by women- because of their race, class and gender. But gender and class considerations took back seat to the more immediate cause of defeating colonial and settler colonial masters.

In the majority of Sub-Saharan Africa countries, women hold fewer than 20% of seats in their national parliaments. However, women in seven countries, namely Rwanda, Namibia, Seychelles, Tanzania, South Africa and Uganda have made major political gains. Currently, women in Uganda hold about 25% of the total seats in parliament, more than 33% of local government seats and about 30% of cabinet positions.

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, heavy lobbying by civil society, and subsequent establishment of gender structures in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have spurred a vigorous campaign whose central theme is that government for men, by men, cannot be government for the people, by the people. In 1997, SADC Heads of State and Government adopted a "Declaration on Gender and Development" that pledged to reach a

target of 30 % women in all spheres of decision- making by 2005. In May 1999 the SADC Gender Unit (SADCGU) convened a ground breaking conference called "Beyond 30% in 2005: Women in Politics and Decision Making in SADC." The conference yielded a comprehensive action plan with regional and national components (<http://www.ideas.2000:3.com>).

Even at this early stage, the fruits of this action plan are evident. In the five SADC countries that held elections in 1999, two maintained the proportion of women parliamentarians while three other witnessed an increase in the level of participation by women. In the case of Botswana, where the above conference was held just before the elections, and where an NGO called Emang Basadi has waged a concerted campaign for increasing the representation of women in decision-making, the figure doubled from 9 to 18 %. Currently, the proportion of women in parliament in SADC is 18%; considerably higher than the African average of 11% (and average for sub Saharan Africa of 9%); and global average of 13.4 %. The proportion is also higher than that for Europe and the Americas, at 15%. Two of the top ten countries in the world with regard to women in parliament (South Africa, Mozambique) are in Southern Africa (<http://www.ideas.2000:3.com>).

What the Southern African and global experience show is that there is no correlation between the level of development and the degree of representation of women in leadership. The single major barrier to women's participation in decision- making remains the deeply ingrained cultural and traditional stereotypes around the role of women, whether in western or African society. For example, customary gender norms and values can lead to political, legal, economic and educational inequalities that perpetuate women's lack of access to resources, control over decision-making, and participation in public life (World Development Report 2000/2001:118).

It is no coincidence that in Southern Africa, as elsewhere on the globe, there is a far closer correlation between the level of women's representation and the existence of social revolutions or upheavals (often ushering in socialist leaning or social democratic governments) than level of economic development. Higher scoring countries include Mozambique, South Africa, Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia whose struggles for liberation began to prick the national conscience over whether equal representation should not also be understood to include representation by women in accordance with their numbers in the population.

Tanzania's social democratic traditions have been critical in ensuring a higher level of participation by women there. Seychelles is unique in that the high level of men seeking employment outside the island has created a virtual matrilineal society. Participation by women was also boosted by the former one party, left leaning government and has in fact dropped since the advent of multiparty democracy- a phenomenon common in eastern Europe.

Some of the lower scoring countries, like Mauritius and Swaziland, have relatively high levels of income, but are socially conservative countries in which the presence of women in the corridors of power remains almost taboo. Botswana was a similar case. Its recent experience shows that socially conservative, but democratically responsive governments, can be cajoled into change (<http://www.ideas.2000:3.com>).

3.3 The Government

Namibia has three levels of government: the national, regional and local level. Namibia's national parliament consists of two houses, the National Assembly and the National Council. The National Assembly has direct law making powers and is composed of 72 members elected through a party list system with an additional 6 non-voting members who are appointed by the President. The National Council recommends legislation on issues concerning the regions and has the power to

raise objections to proposed laws. It consists of 26 members representing the 13 regions of Namibia. Two National Council members are elected by the members of the Regional Councils of each of the regions.

3.3.1 The Cabinet

The Cabinet consists of the President, the Prime Minister and other Minister appointed by the President. The President can also appoint a Deputy Prime Minister as part the Cabinet. The President is obliged to act in consultation with Cabinet, expect where the law says he can act on his own or in consultation with other bodies.

Namibia is a secular, sovereign, democratic and unitary state founded upon the principles of democracy, the rule of law and justice for all. The constitution outlines the division of power between the Executive (Cabinet), the Judiciary and the Legislature (Parliament).

The Cabinet supervises the activities of Ministries and government departments, including parastatals, and initiates bills for submission to the NA. The Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Ministers must be appointed from the ranks of the NA although Deputy Ministers can also be drawn from the NC. The Prime Minister is the leader of government business in parliament, co-ordinates the work of Cabinet and advises and assists the President. The Office of the Prime Minister is also responsible for the management of the public service.

Table 1: Members of Cabinet of Namibia 2004

	President	Prime Minister	Deputy Prime Minister	Ministers	Deputy Ministers
Total no:	1	1	1	20	22
No. of women	0	0	0	5	6
% Women	0	0	0	27%	18%
Port-Folios				Health, Women and Children, Labour, Finances	Finance, Foreign Affairs, Women & Children,

As table 1 indicates, only five ministers are females out of 19. The two portfolios held by women ministers from the gender point of view are a reflection of what is believed to be women's traditional roles as caretakers and mother of the nation. These portfolios cover health and social services, and issues of women and children. As such they conform to traditional beliefs held in the wider society based on the notion that women are, caretakers, and focal points for child rearing and nurturing. The Ministers of Finance and Labour do not hold a traditionally gender stereotyped portfolio. However, a woman has been appointed as Attorney General.

3.3.2 Parliament

i) National Assembly/Upper House

The National Assembly has direct law making powers and is composed of 72 members elected through a party list system with an additional 6 non-voting members who are appointed by the President by virtue of their expertise, skills, status and experience. Even so, they are not allowed to vote in the National Assembly. The electoral system of Namibia is proportional representation, where parties are elected and not individuals. The National Assembly proposes legislation and has the authority to enact laws despite objections from the National Council, if two-thirds of the members approve.

The Electoral system used in the National Assembly is the system of proportional representation in which National Assembly seats are allocated to parties in proportion to votes cast for them, meaning that the more voters the Party has, the more seats it commands in Parliament.

The NA is established in terms of chapter 7 of the Constitution, which gives it the power to make and repeal laws for the peace, order and good government of the country in the best interest of the people of Namibia (Article 63). It is expected to approve budgets and taxation regimes, defend the Constitution and laws of Namibia, agree international treaties, receive reports of government agencies and parastatals, and remain vigilant in ensuring the scourges do not manifest themselves in Namibia. The NA also allows time for oppositions MPs to hold the Prime Minister and Ministers accountable by posing questions relating to matters for which they are responsible.

The President is not a member of NA, but does deliver an annual State of the Nation address after which parliamentarians are allowed to ask questions. The Speaker, who is chosen by MPs, presides over sitting of the NA and has the

authority to make rulings concerning the conduct of proceeding. The Speaker acts as a spokesperson for the NA in its dealings with the State, the President, The National Council and other authorities. The Speaker also has a casting vote in the case of ties.

Table 2: Members of the National Assembly of Namibia 2004

	Elected MPs	Nominated MPs	Speakers	Deputy Speakers
Total No:	72	6	1	1
No. of women	18	0	0	0
% Women	25%	0	0	0

The 25% of women in table 2 is calculated out of 72 elected members without the addition of the six appointed ones. Currently, there is no woman appointee in the National Assembly, however of both appointed and elected members put together, women constitute about 27% of the National Assembly.

3.3.3 National Council

The National Council recommends legislation on issues concerning the regions and has the power to raise objections to proposed laws. It consists of 26 members representing the 13 regions of Namibia. Two National Council members are elected by the members of the Regional Councils of each of the regions. These regional councilors are in turn directly elected by the voters in separate constituencies in each region. If one political party controls the Regional Council then its representatives to the NC would normally be from that party.

National Council reviews bills passed by the National Assembly and recommends legislation of regional importance. Although they can refute proposals made by the National Assembly, laws can be enacted if two-third of the Assembly approve them. The NC has the power to establish its own committees for the purposes of scrutinizing legislation and holding public hearings.

Table 3: Members of the National Council 2004

	National Council Members	Chairperson	Deputy Chairperson
Total No:	26	1	1
No. of women	2	0	1

As table 3 indicates, out of 26 national council members only two are women. There is no electoral act requiring a certain percentage of women candidates in the regional elections like the one-third proportion in local elections.

Women's participation in politics and decision making at the national and regional levels is thus far from satisfactory.

Therefore, the Namibian Government has undertaken various measures to advance the position of women in society and to promote gender equality in all spheres.

A practical problem experienced with these legal requirements is that there are still negative attitudes exhibited towards gender equality at National level. These attitudes pose a serious challenge to the implementation of gender responsive

policies and development programmes. Despite the impressive social policy issues, the objective reality regarding gender equality still has to be fully realised. Parliament as the Legislative branch of government is well placed to promote gender policies as Members of Parliament have an influence on the decisions of their respective political parties. Hence, if Members of Parliament are constantly gender sensitised they will make gender responsive decisions.

The Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare (MWACW) is an important step for women's issues in Namibia. The MWACW is the national lead office for organising national activities to protect women and promote gender equality.

The mission of the MWACW is to "Promote gender equality by empowering women through the dissemination of information, coordination and networking with stakeholders, mainstreaming of gender issues, promotion of law and policy reform and monitoring of progress so as to ensure that women and men can participate equally in the political, economic, social and cultural development of the nation (Ipinge & LeBeau).

3.4 Women in Political Parties

Namibia has several political parties. The main ones are South West Peoples Organisation(SWAPO);Congress of Democrats (COD) and Democratic Turnhalle Alliances (DTA). The structures differ in terms of regional, branches, sections and districts. However, all parties have national level structures, such as Central Committees, Politburos and Executive. In addition, they have National Officers like the president and other officials. Most of the political parties were male dominated and this has made it difficult for women to break into the higher ranks.

The SWAPO Party has a Women's Council(SPWC) that promotes women welfare. This branch has been established since independence. It promotes women's advancement of equality for women and wants women's full

participation in the struggle for economic, political, social and cultural empowerment. The objectives of the SPWC are to achieve equality for women; full participation in cultural, economic and social activities; to assure women's full participation in employment and education; to develop a political understanding among women; and to promote gender awareness among Namibian women.

The Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) also has a Women's League and an Executive Secretary for the Women's League. The DTA does not, however, provide any gender related activities within its organisation.

Congress of Democratic (COD) currently does not have a functioning women's wing, although its constitution makes provision for a Women's Organisation, and it has a gender mandate, which encourages women's equal participation in government. The COD also addresses gender in its constitution, which commits the party to strive for gender balance in all of its structures and political activities. The constitution of COD comprises a provision for a gender balance in line with the current international agreements. The United Democratic Front (UDF), does not have a women's wing (Iipingene and LeBeau, 2004:20).

It appears that Namibia's history makes it clear that political movements and parties have played a major role in bringing women into the political arena and uniting them around common goals such as national liberation and democracy. However, political parties also substantially contribute to division among women and hinder collaboration on common issues. Further, political parties are generally not conducive to the creation of an environment in which critical analysis and new party which distances itself from established politics. A challenge awaits Namibian women and men who are members of established political parties to transform their parties from within.

While political parties are the major obstacles to collaboration among women, structures such as the Parliamentary Women's Caucus and the Elected Women's Forums at national and regional level have been established to promote the interest of women across party lines around issues of common concern. The Parliamentary Women's Caucus was successful in getting women into parliamentary committees and delegations. The Caucus also lobbies for the passage of bill such as the Married Persons Equality Act which was opposed by many male Members of Parliament (MPs): "While our brothers in parliament united against us with the bible under their arms we women campaigned successfully on the basis of the constitution"(Foster, et al. 2004:75).

Political parties have made little effort to promote women as leaders within their own ranks and to nominate them as candidates for national elections. Political parties tend to blame women for not coming forward as candidates, rather than analyzing and removing the many barriers and constraints facing women who enter the male dominated sphere of politics.

3.5 Women in SADC Politics

SADC is the leading region in gender representation in Africa. SADC countries are doing better than some of the oldest and richest democracies in the world such as US, UK, France Australia and Canada. In the SADC region, the two countries with the highest proportion of women in parliament are South Africa 33% and Mosambique 30%; the ruling parties ANC and FRELIMO have party quotas and use the Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system. The PR system, coupled with voluntary party quotas is no doubt a powerful formula for increasing the representation of women and ensuring their effective participation. Namibia is among the few countries in SADC with the PR electoral system and commitments at the highest levels of decision making to achieve at least 30% representation of women in the National Assembly and in other positions of power and decision making. The Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus (RWPC) is convinced

that with 27% representation of women in the National Assembly, Namibia is set to achieve at the least 30% minimum representation in the coming elections.

Short of changing to PR system, countries with a constituency system could look at the option taken by Tanzania of reserving seats for women through a constitutional or legislated quota to be distributed among parties on a PR basis.

There has been little research in the region on the extent to which quotas affect the ability of women elected using such mechanisms to do their work once they are in office. Ironically, those who urge against quotas on the basis that they will lead to tokenism seldom follow up to see if this has been the case. While quotas or special measures may remain a controversial issue, the result of the Rwandan elections in 2003, which resulted in 49% representation of women in parliament, serve as a good example of the impact of affirmative action measures. The countries that have reached or are likely to achieve the 30% representation of women in Parliament by 2005 have mechanisms to improve women's chances of being elected to Parliament. Special measures may not be sufficient by themselves and the general public can benefit from sensitisation campaigns organised by the government, political parties or NGOs to promote the participation of women.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4. Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses data collected on the political empowerment of women in Namibia since Independence. The selection of respondents used judgmental sampling and forty-seven (47) questionnaires were distributed to community members, which represents a 78% response rate. A total of 27 key informants were interviewed.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the following: Sister Namibia, Legal Assistance Centre, political parties, and donor agencies, Parliamentarians and Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare. However, it is worth noting that getting information from politicians proved to be very difficult, because of the elections that are taking place in November 2004. Appointments were cancelled at the last minute and telephonic follow-ups were not returned. There was a great deal of bureaucracy in the process of getting information.

The information was also collected through, among other sources, reviewing literature and reading annual reports, as well as examining different types of official documents. This information was supplemented by qualitative information gathered through semi-structured interviews.

4.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE POPULATION

4.1.1 Demography of Community Members

A total of forty-seven (47) community members were interviewed, of which 66% (N=31) were women and 34% (N=16) were men. More women responded than men.

According to the 2001 Population Census, the Khomas Region has a total population of 250 262 people with 123 613 (49%) women and 126 648 (51%)men. This is represented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Sex Ratio

	Number	Percent
Female	31	66
Male	16	34
Total	47	100

Among the respondents, most of them (34%, N=16) are aged between 15-25 years, (30%, N=14), (26%, N=12) are aged between 36-45. According to the 2001 Population Census, Khomas Region is more characterised by high proportions of the population between the ages of 15 to 45 years. A statistical distribution of the population of the research is presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Age Structure

	Number	Percent
15-25	16	34
26-35	14	30
36-45	12	26
46-55	2	4
>55	3	6
Total	47	100

Marital status as indicated in Table 6 below, shows that there are more single people (49%, N=23) than married ones (38%, N=18). The proportion of divorced and separated people is close to 9 %.

Table 6: Marital Status

	Number	Percent
Single	23	49
Married	18	38
Divorced/Separated	4	9
Living together	2	4
Total	47	100

Table 7 below shows the education levels of the community members. Currently, the Namibian government spends approximately 32% of its Gross National Product (GNP) on education (GRN 2003 a: 17). Table 8 below shows that (51%, N=23) of the population has certificates, (24%, N=11) has higher qualifications. Only (4%, N=2) has grade 1-9, while (20%, N=9) has Secondary Education Grade 10-12. According to the 2001 population census close to 42% of the population has completed Primary Education while about 15% of them completed Secondary Education. About 33% did not complete Primary School. There are no differences in educational attainment between females and males in the country (Population and Housing Census 2001: 34).

Table 7: Education

	Number	Percent
Primary grade 1-9	2	4
Secondary 10-12	9	19
Certificate	23	49
Higher	13	28
Total	47	100

Table 8 below indicates the employment level of the community members. Looking at Table 8, the over-representation of unemployed people becomes obvious. According to the 2001 Population Census the labour force participation rate for the country is over 54%. The rate is higher for males (60%) than for females (49%).

Although this study cannot claim to be statistically representative of the whole population, of the results about employment level, it reflects one of the realities of Namibia's unemployment problem. The data show that about (40%, N=19) are Communal Farmers while (9%, n=4) are Commercial Farmers. The table further reveals that over 32% are government and parastatal employees.

Table 8: Employment

	Number	Percent
Communal Farmers	19	40
Commercial Farmers	4	9
Employees (Government/parastatal)	15	32
Employees (Private)	4	9
Others	5	11
Total	47	100

Table 9: Women in elected office that have responsibility to raise other women's issues

	Number	Percent
Very important	25	53
Important	16	34
Neutral	1	2
Unimportant	4	9
Very unimportant	1	2
Total	47	100

Table 9 above indicates the community members' responses to the question as to whether women in elected office have a responsibility to raise other women's issues. Most respondents said this was very important (56%, N=25), while only a few respondents said it was important (36%, N=16).

Table 10 below indicates responses as to whether men in elected office should represent women's issues or not.

Table 10: Should men in elected office represent women's issues?

	Number	Percent
Very important	16	34
Important	16	34
Neutral	10	21
Unimportant	4	9
Very unimportant	1	2
Total	47	100

Some community members (36%, N=16), responded that it is very important, while few respondents (31%, N=14) said it is important to elect men in office because they will represent women's issues better than women themselves.

Tables 9 and 10 above show that people think women can represent women's issues better than men. It is this study's submission that women are bringing a different perspective into politics and decision-making processes. Bringing more women into Parliament, for example, has promoted the debate and policy development on gender issues.

Women's life experience as home managers and mothers was seen by community members as developing important skills needed for successful participation in politics and public decision-making. The ability to negotiate conflicting interest in extended families is also one of the reasons that women are better leaders than men. It was often said that women were better communicators and were able to promote national and social reconciliation than men, as they were less combative and more willing to understand and respect the feelings of others. This is probably what women bringing a different perspective to politics means.

4.2 WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

4.2.1 Demographics of Key Informants

Key informants were selected on the basis of the nature of their work. A total of 27 key informants were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using guideline questions covering themes about women's political empowerment in Namibia since Independence. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with all key informants at their offices or homes, using the preferred language of the informant. Each key informant was allowed to answer in as much detail as he or she liked, and then was guided to the next question. Notes were taken during the interviews and in a few cases

audio tape recording was done, although some of the key informants refused to be recorded.

4.2.2 Satisfaction with Empowerment

Table 11 and 12 below show that 15 key informants were satisfied (Yes = 56 %), while 7 (No= 26%) were not satisfied with the representation of women in the National Assembly and Cabinet.

The majority of key informants indicated above that they are satisfied with women's representation in the National Assembly and Cabinet, while some community members said they were very satisfied (21%, N=10), satisfied (19, %, N=9), not satisfied (36 %, N=17), dissatisfied (1, %, N=1) with women's representation in the National Assembly and Cabinet. The most often given response by key informants is satisfied. As previously stated only 27% women are represented in the Namibian Parliament. This scenario can be partly ascribed to the inherited colonial institutions that were based on the oppressive system of Apartheid and patriarchal political culture that excluded women in the past. However, it is common throughout the world that women's political empowerment is a fundamental challenge for the coming millennium.

Table 11: Women's representation in the National Assembly and Cabinet

Yes	15	56
No	7	26
Neutral	5	19
Total	27	100

**Table 12: Satisfaction with Women's Representation in the National Assembly
And Cabinet**

	Number	Percent
Very satisfied	10	21
Satisfied	9	19
Neutral	10	21
Not satisfied	17	36
Very unsatisfied	2	2
Total	47	100

From the above findings, it is clear that focusing only on increasing the numbers of women in Parliament or other political bodies in the interest of gender balance is too narrow an approach. This must go hand in hand with campaigning for the inclusion of women's perspectives in politics and decision-making by both women and men.

Some of the key informants stated that it is easy enough to show that women, who constitute the majority of the world's population, are under-represented in politics, and institutions like parliament. This under- presentation hampers the process of democracy in the world. According to the United Nations (UN) statement to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 "... is the gap between de jure and de facto equality among men and women greater than in the area of decision making (UN Report 1995:12). One key informant said that something is definitely wrong with the system that claims to be just and based on the will of the people, and yet excludes the majority of the people in decision-making process about themselves and their society.

One key informant from MWACW stated the following:

Women are more than half of the Namibian population and more than 52 % of voters, yet they hold fewer elected positions than men in decision-making bodies. For example, women make up only 26, 9 % in Parliament. There are only two women out of 26 members in the National Council and five out of 27 Cabinet members.

Political parties should take it upon themselves and get women involved in political and development issues; otherwise Namibia will not achieve the 30% minimum representation in Parliament (National Assembly) by 2005.

According to SADC Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus (2003:31) the under representation of women in parliaments continues to be an issue particularly for women; hence various strategies are initiated by government in order to increase the number of women in power and decision-making. Attempts for proportional representation such as setting quotas, reserving seats, or appointing women are just a few ways of attaining gender balance in representation within political and decision making bodies (SADC Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus 2003:31).

4.2.3 Barriers to Empowerment

Table 13: Community Members Ratings of Barriers to Empowerment

	Very important		Important		Neutral		Unimportant		Very Important		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Education	13	28	10	21	18	38	5	11	1	2	47
Culture	16	34	20	43	3	6	7	15	1	2	47
Confidence	5	11	5	11	15	32	7	15	15	32	47
Law Reforms	15	32	10	21	5	11	7	15	10	21	47
Domestic responsibilities	15	32	4	32	3	6	2	4	12	26	47
Women's lack of interest	5	11	4	32	15	6	2	4	5	11	47

A full statistical profile of the research is presented in Table 13 above. Community members were given a list of possible barriers to women's empowerment and were asked how important they thought each was in hampering women's greater political empowerment. Community members rate the following barriers to empowerment as follows:

Education: Community members said that barriers to education were very important (28 %, N=13) or important (21%, N=10) while only a few said that such barriers were either unimportant (11%N=5) or very unimportant (2%, N=1) to women's empowerment. These data show that people feel that barriers to education are preventing women's empowerment. Women's education worldwide has been used as one of the long-term poverty alleviation, economic and political empowerment strategies. Based on these data, policies that encourage the education of women would also help women politically.

Many developing countries are making progress on several fronts, particularly in achieving universal primary education and gender equality in access to education. But for much of the world the prospects are bleak. At current trends, 33 countries with more than a quarter of the world's people will achieve fewer than half the goals by 2015 (Human Development Report 2002:2).

According to Morna (2004: 90) education does not necessarily translate into access to decision- making. However, once women are in a position of power, having a higher level of education can be a facilitator, even though it is not the only pre-requisite for decision-making processes.

Culture: Some of the community said that culture was very important (34%, N=16) or important (43%, N=20), while only few numbers said that culture was very unimportant (2%, N=1). This study found out that culture is represented as a static ideology that cannot change because it has always been this way. According to Iiping and LeBeau(2004:3) cultural patriarchy based on culture leads to discrimination against women. Despite the support of the President of Namibia and the best efforts of gender advocates, there are still negative attitudes towards gender equality at both local and national level.

Culture hampers women's participation in politics. For example, in African societies, cultural patriarchy is the institutionalised dominance of male ideologies, which means that children are defined through the father, and women are known in relation to men as

their father, husbands and sons. In patriarchal social systems men have rights over women's bodies, labour, identity and many aspects of life. Beliefs, laws and customs support the cultural patriarchal male dominance because men control laws, education, religion and politics among other dominating structures. Men are seen as naturally superior to women and that they have the major decision making power in a family, government and community. Women, on the other hand, are seen as less capable of making decisions, as they are dependent on men. Many women have "accepted" this state of affairs without questioning it.

Women in Namibia were viewed in the past as at best second-class citizens, and at worst as the property of men (Iipinga and LeBeau 2004:54). Because of these cultural beliefs, women's control over their lives has been reduced.

Confidence: Community members considered lack of confidence as not being major obstacle. Very important and important ratings have the same number (11%, N=5), while very unimportant were (32%, N=15). A lack of confidence hampers women's performances. In Sweden, according to Olofsson, cited in Morna (2004:91), women do not speak a lot. Although women's representation in parliament looks good in number, Olofsson said that in terms of decision-making, women are very weak. "We have the number but not quality." These data support this study's findings that women are deprived of political empowerment by a lack of self-confidence.

Law reform: Community members said that law reform was very important (32 %, N=15) or important (21%, N=10), while only (15%, N=7) said it is unimportant to help women's empowerment. These statistics show that law reforms are the first step in changing a society that discriminates against women. According to Iipinga and LeBeau (2004: 11) at Independence there were thirteen laws that favoured men over women. Many of these laws have been changed, but not without resistance from male lawmakers and men from Namibian communities. Discrimination against women by the law itself leads to discrimination in other areas of life, and leaves women with no means of

addressing social inequalities. The data from this study show that community members recognize the importance of law reform in empowering women.

Domestic responsibilities: Community members said that domestic responsibilities were very important and important (32 %,N=15) respectively to women's empowerment. Community members feel that domestic responsibilities among others prevent women's fuller participation in the political arena. Traditionally, women are expected to focus their lives on taking care of their families, and this exercise makes them not take part in politics. But today women cannot afford to stay at home. The reality is that women are no longer confined to the domestic sphere. Their horizon has expanded; they are regular breadwinners who actively engage in all political and social activities.

Women's lack of interest in decision-making: Community members said that women's lack of interest in decision making was important (32%, N=15), while only (4%,N=5) said it was very unimportant for women's empowerment. Women do not enjoy the same privileges and opportunities as men, although in most countries there are mechanisms that promote women empowerment. For instance, while everyone has the right to seek public office, some women lack access to resources needed for a political campaign. The existence of legislation, policies or quotas is not sufficient to ensure women's increased access to decision-making positions. A strong political will on the part of government, political parties and other organisations is needed to create an environment conducive to women's political empowerment.

In the second question, key informants focused on barriers that prevent women's participation in decision-making. Culture, attitudes, education and lack of confidence top the list of barriers that prevent women's participation in the decision-making process. Other barriers that make it impossible for women to be effective in full time politics are their role as mothers and as caretakers of children, the elderly and the sick.

Other key informants said leadership in public life is new to Namibian women. Traditionally women were confined to household chores. However, as was mentioned at the beginning of this study, there had been some lineages of female chiefs and

headwomen in a number of Namibian communities in the past, and some of these communities have women leaders today.

In fact, the 1997 UNDP Report on Human Development has stated that gender equality needs to be part of each country's strategy for eradicating poverty, both as an end and as a means to eradicating other forms of human poverty. This means focusing on ending discrimination against girls in all aspects of health, education, power and upbringing; empowering women by ensuring equal rights and access to land and job opportunities to mentioned a few.

The lack of education is also one of the barriers that prevent women from participating in politics. Most of the informants emphasised the importance of education. One key informant said:

If women are not educated, they will lack confidence and, as result, they will be unable to speak English, to understand that the English language is the official medium of communication. Formal education was now more important for leadership than during the struggle for national liberation.

They stated that drafting new legislation or making constructive contributions to the development of civil society required higher levels of education.

Another key informant said women's attitudes are also one of the barriers that prevent women from participating in politics. Much can also be attributed to the support among women. Some informants argued that women do not support each other. They said Namibian women should guard against reinforcing the so-called "pull her down syndrome", because this caused disunity among women. This informant said that changing women's attitudes is part of a general consciousness awareness raising process, which requires all our efforts.

In fact, all these chances are new to Namibia. "Leadership in public life is new to Namibian women. Traditionally women were confined to household chores."

4.2.4 Mechanisms to Promote Women's Empowerment

This research also sought to find out what mechanisms are in place to promote women's empowerment. Some of the informants said that access to education, laws promoting equal rights, political parties, the Constitution, gender mainstreaming and an enabling environment are some of the mechanisms in place that promote women's empowerment. In fact, in Namibia many of these mechanisms are being put in place. For example, at Independence, the Republic of Namibia adopted a Gender Neutral Constitution. Article 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia states that all persons shall be equal before the law, and that no person shall be discriminated against on the ground of sex (The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, 1990).

The Constitution, therefore, creates an enabling environment for attaining gender balance in the country.

As mentioned earlier, in 1992, Namibia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination of Women (CEDAW). Regular reports have been submitted to the United Nations with regard to implementing the (CEDAW)(Iipinge and Mwandangi 2001:2-3).

The Parliament of Namibia also adopted a National Gender Policy in 1997. The main aim of this policy is to contemplate how government can encourage and value the contribution of women in national and societal development. The National Gender Policy continues to support efforts aimed at improving awareness among policy makers, planners and implementers of the constitutional provisions regarding equal status of women and men as partners in the country's development. In order to realise these goals as stated in the National Gender Policy, the National Gender Plan of Action identifies the national goals, expected outcome and the role-players in the implementation process (Iipinge and Mwandangi 2001:2-3).

The Parliament of Namibia also passed laws that give rights to women such as the Married Person Equality Act which makes provision for women married in community of property to own property, Local Authorities Act, which calls for one-third of the election candidates to be female, while the Combating of Rape and Domestic Violence Bills aimed at protecting women (Ipinge and LeBeau 2004:11).

Therefore, some of the key informants agree that the Namibian Government has undertaken various measures to advance the position of women in society and to promote gender equality in all spheres of social, legal and economic life.

This study also found that people feel that changing laws and government policies alone does not guarantee the protection of women's rights, nor does it remove gender discrimination from all levels of society. For example, one key informant stated:

This is not to say that law should not be implemented because it is not effective, but that law reform alone cannot change the realities within which women live. Information campaigns and education can make people aware of changing ways of viewing men's rights.

According to Ipinge and LeBeau (2004:49) most men are not happy about the current trend in Namibia towards empowering women. Men in general do not like the idea of women's rights, but that is a reality people have to live with. Men are frightened by the rising status of women and see this as a direct threat to their own social position (Ipinge and LeBeau 2004:49).

4.2.5 Factors that hinder Women's Political Empowerment

Factors that hinder women's political empowerment were also examined. Some of the interviewees stated that discrimination, competition with male counterparts, traditional practices, a lack of exposure, a lack of educational skills, women's low confidence, patriarchal culture are some of the factors that hinder women's political empowerment.

Some women felt that they are discriminated against on the grounds of sex. However, the Constitution, as discussed earlier, makes provision for Affirmative Action aimed at disadvantaged groups, including women and people with disabilities.

Another factor that hinders women's political empowerment is the situation of patriarchal cultures and traditions, entrenched through institutions such as the state, the media and political parties that have kept women out. For example, one key informant said:

Patriarchy as a system, an ideology and practice impacts in different ways on the lives of women wherever they are. Patriarchal attitudes or cultures become so embedded that they are taken as natural. Even where there is supposed to be equality, these cultural attitudes prevail.

Patriarchy, strengthened by cultural beliefs, reduces women's control over their lives. In fact, in Namibia, it is the system of patriarchy, the rule of men, that is to be blamed as well. Traditional values and norms, reinforced by western patriarchy, remain strong in most parts of Namibia and reinforce gender biases (LeBeau 2004:4).

One woman informant noted that, there was an era of hope during the time of the liberation struggle when the war was fought and won by both women and men. She emphasised that women played just as important a role as men during this time. They were out there on the battlefields and in the camps, taking care of children and the wounded. More importantly, they did men's jobs. This informant said that a government with few women was formed and 'leaders focused on a narrow agenda that pushed women to the margins.'

She reported that women began questioning whose liberation it was. She felt that maybe the liberation struggle, although fought by both men and women was primarily for men's liberation. In 1995 the Beijing Conference became a new source of inspiration for many women because their rights were recognised. Women's movements began to assert women's rights but patriarchal men accused them of being un-African imperialists adopting western ideas. According to Cooper and Lybrand (1994) Parliament is patriarchal and power is obvious; women are in danger of being swallowed by its culture,

its values and priorities. Women sometimes tend not to want to rock the boat and in that way act as "honorary men" in adopting male behaviours. Women fear to be marginalised by raising things that are seen to be petty women's things. They get afraid of moving against the mainstream, by so doing, they find themselves compromising and promoting the very patriarchal agenda (Cooper and Lybrand, 1994).

One Parliamentary key informant said that lack of confidence was also one of the factors that hinder women's political empowerment.

When I first came time to Parliament, I felt out of place, isolated, with no education and I was just bombarded with everything. Despite the fact that I was in a powerful institution, I was completely powerless and could not participate. It was not until 1997 that I started to grasp most of the things. I also started choosing committees where I was at least comfortable and which were not too technical. Now, I can stand up and challenge anyone, especially the opposition, with confidence. I realise that the lack of confidence had shackled me for a long time, made me withdraw and bitter against those who were privileged with know-how. All that resentment that built up has now disappeared with the confidence I now have.

Moreover, a lack of confidence develops as change takes place. This was discussed when women could track some changes as a result of their own contribution. Another factor is discriminatory attitudes and behaviour on the part of decision makers, which are a serious challenge to the implementation of gender policies and programmes.

4.2.6 Procedures that enable Women to rise to Leadership Positions.

This research also focused on the procedures that enable women to rise to leadership positions. Some informants indicated that there are procedures in place that enable women to rise to leadership positions. For example, one key informant said, "Women need an enabling environment to expose themselves through political parties".

Other key informant further indicated that workshops are a very popular activity in the Namibian socio-political setting. They explained that they strategically empowered women for political activities. This informant said politically related workshop activities empower women to go along the road of their full emancipation.

These informants stated that Namibia's traditional cultures and its colonial history negated, oppressed and neglected women in many ways, to the point that by the time of Independence women were treated as inferiors. Women further argued that to overcome such legacy is not an easy task. All Namibian women have a stake in democracy, irrespective of their cultural background, education, age, marital and social status, or political affiliation. In other words, a person's plight as a woman is more important than anything that could separate them.

One woman key informant also noted that Namibia is lucky to have a government that believes in, and actively promotes gender equality in all areas of political, economical and social life. Namibia is committed to the advancement of gender equality at the highest levels of government. According to Iiping and LeBeau (2004:3) the Constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex, and the government of Namibia has signed several international agreements and national policies aimed at the promotion of gender equality.

4.2.7 Equal Opportunities for Men and Women

This research also sought to find out whether or not there are equal opportunities for both men and women. As Table 14 below shows, that a considerable number of key informants indicate that there are no equal opportunities for both men and women.

Table 14: Equal opportunities for Men and Women

	Number	Percent
Yes	6	22
No	21	78
Total	27	100

Key informants (78%) said that there are no equal opportunities for both men and women. Women are under-present in political decision-making spheres. Men are given more preference because of their so-called assumed power in society. Culture blocks advancement of women.

The 22% that indicated that there are equal opportunities for both men and women give the following reasons: laws are in place; opportunities for all are there; the Namibian Constitution guarantees all people equal rights; women are their own worst enemies.

Some women key informants said that they are constrained by tradition in their specific cultures. They further emphasised that men control women. Not only did they use tradition and culture selectively on the home front, but also in public life. One man pointed out that in their culture there is an adage that says that a "cow cannot lead the herd." Women should not give instructions to men, especially older ones.

According to LeBeau (2004:24) few men, while acknowledging that some customs discriminate against women, do not think that patriarchy based on culture is wrong. Some men and one older woman, do not think there is any discrimination in their culture, while other men indicated that culture protects women because men are responsible for taking care of women and protecting them.

4.2.8 Politics is Hostile Terrain for Women

Some questions asked whether or not politics is still a hostile terrain for women or not. As been seen on Table 15 most of the informants indicated that politics is not a hostile terrain for women.

Table 15: Politics is a Hostile Terrain for Women

	Number	Percent
Yes	20	74
No	7	26
Total	27	100

Only 74 % agree that politics is still a hostile terrain for women. Some of the key informants support their answers with the following reasons: there are just few women in political leadership position; politics is a dirty game in which many women do not want to get involved; it invokes competition.

Some informants continue to emphasise that politics was a prestigious profession with a lot of challenges that many, especially women, cannot handle. They further elaborate that only 18 out of 72 elected members of the National Assembly are women. According to them, this could be due to the fact that politics is a profession that comes with "thorns and roses". The media create thorns, they argue, where they promote the image of individual women who try to access power. They added: "Politics is filled with its own requirements and one has to undergo and exercise where these thorns are found," they said.

4.2.9 Why Women should participate in Decision Making Structures

The study sought to find out, why it is important that women should participate in decision-making structures such as the Cabinet and Parliament. Some key informants said that women should participate in these very important bodies so that they can express their concerns, worries, issues affecting them and their children, because it is their constitutional right, both men and women to have different viewpoints on issues of concern for decision-making, to make Cabinet and Parliament more effective and efficient. These are some of the factors raised as to why women should participate in decision making structures.

They further stress that the views on women that underlie their political involvement today include: the desire to serve their community, the right of women to voice and to represent themselves rather than be represented by men, the desire to serve women's interests and to overcome paternalistic attitudes towards men, reconciliation, gender equality, promoting tolerance and respect for cultural diversity. These views brought a feminist critique of patriarchal power into the political debate in order to challenge and transform social and political institutions and practices.

Other informants further emphasised that patriarchy as a system, an ideology and practice impacts in different ways on the lives of women wherever they may be. Patriarchal attitudes become so embedded that they are taken as natural. Because parliament is so patriarchal and power is so obvious, women are in danger of being swallowed by its culture.

Gender roles for women, per se, do not automatically change for women when they enter parliament. Expectations and the need to perform socially defined women's roles prevail. Women have to balance these with their parliamentary responsibilities. The findings revealed that women came to politics and decision-making with different values, understanding and perspectives. These values should be acknowledged and accepted in order to build common ground among the diversity of women in this country. The key informant said it is worth noting that women were the best when it comes to leadership style.

4.2.10 Information included in the Document of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

The study also focused on the information that should be included in the document when dealing with the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

The key informants made the following suggestions: 50/50 representation of women in all structures; enhancing women's educational level; changing societal attitudes and community practices by active participation and involvement of both men and women; entrenching laws that promote women, without oppressing men; finding ways in which women can be empowered; criminalising acts that might promote discrimination; monitoring and performance evaluation.

They said that it is imperative that these points should be included in the Document Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women because it promotes women empowerment in different forms.

4.2.11 Quotas

The last question discusses the relevance of using quotas in boosting women's participation in the decision-making process. One of the key informants pointed out that:

The disadvantages of having seats reserved for women are that these seats are regarded as second class; however, to give chances to women in leadership position through quotas would encourage women to participate effectively in politics

Another key informant had different views about a quota system. He argued that it has some disadvantages, the main one being that it may sometimes mean that talented male candidates may lose out to women whose main qualifications are their gender. This is what he said:

If a party which does not already have a large number of talented and experienced female members instituted a quota system, it does not only risks creating resentment amongst its male members, but if it puts forward inexperienced or unsuitable women candidates, it risks losing seats in the elections.

For this reason, it has been suggested that a quota system applies not to parties but to Parliament itself. Some of the interviewees suggested that where proportional representation is used, women do better in a closed list system, where voters choose from a party list, but not individual members, as opposed to the preferential system, where a voter selects individual candidates from the party list.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

While the brief historical overview showed that women's participation in the public realm is not a new phenomenon, the statistical analysis of the current status of women in elected and appointed decision-making bodies revealed that women are still a small minority, particularly at national level of government.

The study found that there are many legal, institutional, political, social and cultural discourses, which promote or constrain women's participation in politics and decision-making. A broad range of needs emerged in the areas of further research, monitoring and evaluation, policy development and implementation, training including gender training, organisational development, collaboration and networking. These must be addressed if women's participation in politics and decision-making is to make more visible strides. At the same time, cognisance must be taken of the fact that gender justice will not be possible while other forms of social injustice prevail.

One of the objectives of this study was to determine whether or not there are procedures in place that promote women's political empowerment in Namibia and to determine factors that hinder women's political empowerment. Firstly, the study has found that changing laws and government policies alone neither guarantee the protection of women's rights nor remove gender discrimination from all sorts of levels of society. Women have the responsibility to get elected, because women still have to do everything in their power to continue uplifting and emancipating Namibian women, and this can be better achieved if they enjoy people's confidence. It is common knowledge that African women, especially rural women, are today the "wretched on the earth", still dispossessed, marginalised, poor, abused, still extremely vulnerable. Government must be their voice, their advocates, supporters and protectors.

It is very important that government of the day should be representative of all people. During the study it became clear that women come to politics and decision-making with

different values, perspectives and understandings. These need to be acknowledged and accepted in order to build common ground among the diversity of women in this country.

The study further revealed that, once they are in the institution of power (Parliament), women have faced new obstacles that constrain their capacity to function. Even where a large number of women have gone into parliament, one finds that the institutions have not changed significantly to facilitate their effective and equal participation. In most cases, parliaments were established on the basis of gender relations of the time and gender roles flowing from the assumption that governance, as part of the public sphere, is the exclusive domain of men. Males do not promote women or women's issues. It remains imperative to emphasise that women themselves must organise and mobilize their networks, learn to communicate their interests with different organisations and push for mechanisms to enhance their own representation.

The objective of parliaments and political parties should be to improve and enhance women's effectiveness in political positions and to strengthen their impact in decision making forums. It is paramount for women to know that they have to be there, within the political process where it matters. Whether it is at the rural council, urban council or other levels of policy making, they have to be there to ensure that women's agenda is addressed.

The study found that, apart from the challenge of implementing the policy within parliament, which requires more extensive and broad based national consultations and partnerships, there is also a need to re-orient some traditions and the stereotyping of women, which continues to reinforce inequality, exclusion, gender based violence and even the implementation of new and gender sensitive laws. There needs to be a concerted multi-media gender education and information campaign aimed at addressing gender stereotypes and negative gender attitudes. Women should further strive to enhance access, participation and transformation of women in parliament.

In my opinion, engendering parliaments will empower parliamentarians to appreciate the review of existing laws and the passage of gender sensitive policies and laws. This brings us to the question of institutional change: reforming the system rather than simply trying to work within it. Therefore governments, especially in Africa, should avoid developing policies, which are good on paper but cannot be implemented.

Media practitioners should report about women who made a difference in society and also encourage others who are still emerging. The media should also try to root out the myth that politics is for men only.

There is currently the National Gender Policy (NGP), but it is not legally binding and, therefore, it is easily ignored by many people in decision-making positions. Therefore, there is currently no mechanism for ensuring that the NGP is implemented.

The study found that there are practical problems experienced by women, namely negative attitudes exhibited towards gender equality at national level.

These attitudes pose a serious challenge to the implementation of gender responsive policies and development programmes. Despite the impressive social policy issues, the objective reality regarding gender equality still has to be fully realised. Parliament as the legislative branch of government is well placed to promote gender policies, as members of Parliament have an influence on the decisions of their respective political parties. Hence, if members of parliament are constantly gender sensitized, they will make gender responsive decisions.

Finally, being committed to creating equal opportunities, the Republic of Namibia adopted a Gender Neutral Constitution. The Constitution therefore creates an enabling environment for attaining gender balance in the country. With such a background, politicians may be able to bring party agenda and government debates to the fore with the support of the women groups on outside issues and concerns of women, thus forging feminist consciousness arising out of women's participation. In the agenda, the strategy

should be getting women conscientised, and inspiring them to appreciate the importance of their involvement in the system and, showing them their responsibilities and accountability to each other. By virtue of being present in strategic decision making structures, women will be able to use the chance to learn, and to inspire others to question their situations. While present, they could use other strategies and approaches such as lobbying the legislatures, and fighting to bring about outright changes of public opinion through mass media.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the preceding scenarios the study recommends that:

- ◆ Policies which emphasise the role and significance of women in decision-making need to be implemented. A lot still needs to be done to sensitise both men and women so that they can understand that women are and can be good leaders like men. By so doing, it will be possible for women to come out of their significant invisibility in the decision making structures of all bodies in Namibia.

- ◆ Affirmative Action Act should be applied in all the political parties, by way of the quota system, to ensure that women are part and parcel of all decision-making bodies in the political parties, as this is their entry point into politics. This should not only apply at the national structures but also at the regional, district and branch levels. This will ensure an appreciation of women's roles and contributions from their community and constituency-based political activities.

- ◆ Electoral systems should be changed to include a quota system. The quota system will facilitate women's entrance to politics and decision-making. Quotas are temporary measures, but they are quite useful, because they are designed to overcome imbalances that exist between men and women. They are an effort to change the political and decision-making imbalances between

women and men. The quota system should be introduced and implemented at all levels of decision-making.

- ◆ Although restructuring and amending policies and acts is an ultimate fundamental activity for attaining gender equality, other ongoing processes within the society contribute, to some extent, to the difficulties faced by women in entering decision-making structures. This includes among other things, the notion that women are second-class citizens and need men to make sensible decisions for them. As such, the whole Namibian society needs to be sensitized to fully comprehend women's role and contribution to the development of the country. Research should be conducted to document and analyse the contributions made by those few women already in decision-making. This way, the importance of having women in decision-making would not go unnoticed and the significance of the impacts they have made would be recorded.
- ◆ Changing the electoral system is only one part of a more comprehensive strategy for improving women's representation. Women would need to become active and effective voices within their individual parties and within society as a whole in order to take advantage of the institutional benefits certain electoral structures provide.
- ◆ There is a need for a National Gender Act of Parliament, stipulating gender-mainstreaming activities with timelines for implementation provided.
- ◆ There is a need to revisit policy documents such as the National Gender Policy and Plan of Action in order to spell out priorities, resources, powers and responsibilities as well as time frames for implementation.

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Appendix I: Questionnaire for Master in Public Policy and Administration: Community Members

UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

An Analysis of Political Empowerment of Women in Namibia since Independence.

Good day, my name is Erika Thomas from the University of Namibia. I am undertaking a research project in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Master in Public Policy and Administration. As part of this project, I would like to ask you some questions. The information you are providing will be handled with confidentiality, and therefore, no names and personal details will be mentioned.

Therefore I would appreciate it if you could spare your time to answer the attached questions.

Thank you for your valued assistance.

Kindly circle number next to a box number.

A: Personal information

1. Gender

1	Female
2	Male

2. How old are you?

1	15 - 24
2	26 - 35
3	36 - 45
4	46 - 55
5	>55

3. What is your marital status?

1	Single
2	Married
3	Divorce/Separated
4	Widow/Widower
5	Living together

4. Educational standard (cross).

1	None
2	Primary grade 1 -9
3	Secondary grade 10 - 12
4	Matric
5	Certificate/Diploma
6	Higher

5. Where do you work?

1	Communal farmers
2	Commercial farmer
3	Employee (Govt./Parastatal)
4	Employee (Private)
5	Others

B. Gender Issues

6. How important is it for women in elected office have a responsibility to raise other women 's issues?

1	Very important
2	Important
3	Neutral
4	Unimportant
5	Very important

7. How important is it for men in elected office to represent women's issues?

1	Very important
2	Important

3	Neutral
4	Unimportant
5	Very important

8. How satisfied are you with women's representation in the National Assembly and Cabinet?

1	Very satisfied
2	Satisfied
3	Neutral
4	Not satisfied
5	Very unsatisfied

9. Please rank, which you feel are the least important barriers to women participating in decision making by crossing one of the reasons below.

	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very Unimportant
Culture					
Education					
Confidence					
Law					
Domestic responsibility					
Women's lack of interest in decision making					

Thank you.

**APPENDIX II: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MASTER IN PUBLIC POLICY
AND ADMINISTRATION: KEY INFORMANTS**

UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

An Analysis of Political Empowerment of Women in Namibia since Independence.

Good day, my name is Erika Kaukungwa-Thomas from the University of Namibia/UNAM/ISS MPPA Postgraduate Programme. I am undertaking a research project in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Master in Public Policy and Administration. As part of this project, I would like to ask you some questions. The information you are providing will be handled with confidentiality, and therefore, no names and personal details will be mentioned.

Therefore I would appreciate it if you could spare your time to answer the attached questions.

Thank you for your valued assistance.

1. How satisfied are you with women representation in the National Assembly and Cabinet?

- a) Very satisfied
- b) Satisfied
- c) Neutral
- d) Not satisfied
- e) Very unsatisfied

Please substantiate your answer

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2. What are the barriers to women participation in decision-making?

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3. What mechanisms are in place to promote women empowerment?

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4. What factors hinder women's political empowerment?

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5. What procedures enable women to rise to leadership position?

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.....

.....

6. Are there equal opportunities for both men and women?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Give reasons

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7. Do you agree with the statement "Politics is still a hostile terrain for women"?

- a) Yes
- b) No

Give reasons

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.....

8. Why should women participate in decision-making structures such as the Cabinet and Parliament?

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.....
.....

9. What should be contained in documents that deal with the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against women?

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.....

10. Why is it important to use quotas for boosting women's participation in decision making?

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.....
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Thank you.