

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine how once inside parliament, women perceive their ability to influence the political agenda in a male dominated institution. Often, the experiences of the female parliamentarians are told by a second or third party such as the media who tell the women's stories from the perspective of the media.

The thesis focuses on the female Parliamentarians' perceptions of their political influence in the Namibian National Assembly. Various players internationally and regionally have fought and continue fighting to find ways of getting more women into parliament. However what has not taken place in earnest is a discussion on how women fare once inside parliament, a male dominated institution.

Media reports in 2010 and 2011 reported on how the female parliamentarians were failing in their parliamentary duties by not speaking out. This damning evidence came about as a result of a research that analyzed the amount of contributions that members of the National Assembly made to parliamentary debate.

Using the qualitative research method and face-to-face structured interviews with the Parliamentarians, the findings revealed that twenty two years after independence and having what is considered to be a good gender policy in Southern Africa, female Parliamentarians in addition to facing various challenges including gender-based power imbalance also remain under-represented.

A major finding is that despite the challenges, female Parliamentarians perceive themselves to have a high level of political influence. Participants felt that the attitude of political parties regarding women's role in parliament was critical in facilitating their influence on the political agenda. This study intends to contribute to the local gender and political discourse

and knowledge by documenting the voices of female parliamentarians as they express their views and opinions on public issues that affect their everyday political experiences.

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Secondly many thanks to the Members of Parliament who despite their hectic schedules found time to be interviewed and were very welcoming. Their shared views and opinions were a real eye opener.

DEDICATION

To Pempelani, Lwando, Lwimba and Lusungu – everyday with you is a special blessing.

DECLARATION

I Jennifer Mwiche Mumbi Mufune, certify that ‘The Study of Female Parliamentarians’ Perceptions of their Political Influence in the Namibian Parliament’ is my own work, that has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been fully acknowledged in the references.

Signed: *J.M.M Mufune*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Dedication	iv
Declaration	v
Table of contents	vi
Abbreviation	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction and background of the study	
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of study	1
1.3 Statement of the problem	6
1.4 Research question	8
1.5 Objective of the study	8
1.6 Significance of the study	8
1.7 Limitations of the study	9
1.8 Outline of the thesis	10
Chapter 2: Definition of key concepts and Literature review	
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Literature review	11
2.3 Definition of key concepts	12
2.4 Conceptual framework	17
2.5 Namibian government commitment to gender equality	20
2.6 Challenges faced by female parliamentarians	33
2.6.1 Issue of culture	33
2.6.2 Public vs Private	35

2.6.3 Political Parties as gate keepers	36
2.6.4 Under-representation of women and the critical mass	41
2.6.5 The media portrayal of women in parliament	43
2.6.6 Language and communication	49
2.6.7 Woman's lack of experience	54
2.7 Conclusion	55
Chapter 3: Research methodology	
3.1 Introduction	57
3.2 Research design	57
3.3 Case study	59
3.4 Research population	60
3.5 Sampling procedure	61
3.6 Research instruments	62
3.6.1 Interviews	62
3.6.2 Document analysis	64
3.7 Data collection procedure	64
3.8 Data analysis	65
3.9 Research ethics	67
3.10 Conclusion	68
Chapter 4: Data presentation and analysis	
4.1 Introduction	69
4.2 Interview findings	73
4.2.1 Reasons for joining politics	73
4.2.2 Reaction to parliament chambers	75
4.2.3 Moments in parliament	76
4.2.4 Media reports based on IRR research	78
4.2.5 Perception of political influence	81

4.2.6	Difference made as individual MP	82
4.2.7	Working with Female parliamentarians from other parties	83
4.2.8	Obstacles	84
4.2.9	Support from political parties	87
4.2.10	Role of political parties	88
4.2.11	Positive and significant changes	90
4.2.12	Attention from mainstream media	91
4.2.13	Alliances outside parliament	92
4.2.14	Effectiveness of women's caucus	94
4.2.15	Voting along party lines	95
4.2.16	Influence of female parliamentarians when shaping agenda	96
4.2.17	Positive change brought about by female presence	96
4.2.18	Perspectives and positions of women	97
4.2.19	Gender sensitivity of parliamentarians	98
4.2.20	Traditional rules and practices	99
4.2.21	Balancing family and politics	101
4.3	Conclusion	103

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1	Introduction	
5.2	Conclusion	104
5.3	Recommendations	104
5.3.1	Political parties	108
5.3.2	Network efforts	109
5.3.3	Forming partnerships with the media	109
5.3.4	Support female MPS through training and guidance	110

5.3.5 Evaluation and monitoring	112
5.3.4 References	113

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

APP	All People's Party
COD	Congress of Democrats
DCN	Democratic Convention of Namibia
DTA	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance
FCN	Federal Convention of Namibia
IPPR	The Institute For Public Policy Research
MAG	Monitor Action Group
MPs	Members of Parliament
MISA	Media Institute of Southern Africa
NA	National Assembly
NNF	Namibian National Front
NPF	National Patriotic Front
NUDO	National Unity Democratic Organisation
RDP	Rally for Democracy and Progress
RP	Republican Party
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SWANU	South West Africa National Union

SWAPO South West Africa People's Organisation

UDF United Democratic Front

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the study by providing the background information of the research, the research problem, the research question, the aims and objectives and the significance of the study. The chapter also provides an outline of the chapters in this thesis.

1.2 Background of the study

Various arguments have been advanced throughout the years as to why there should be similar numbers of women and men in parliament (International IDEA: 2002; IPU: 2008; Morna:2003). The arguments can be summarized by firstly stating that as a matter of justice, women should have an equal opportunity to participate and be represented in political institutions. Secondly by opening parliament to women the pool of talent that may be drawn on is doubled. Women politicians may improve the electoral appeal of parties and their participation may improve the standards of behavior in parliament. Thirdly and symbolically, women parliamentarians serve as role models for women outside parliament and can assist in improving their status in the community as well as demonstrating the different options available to women.

Women members also ensure the legitimacy of the parliamentary institution as a broader section of society is represented. Fourthly as a representation of values, perspectives and experience, women members bring their own experience and style to parliament and may reduce the aggressive nature of parliamentary debate. They can also highlight the social impact of policies that may otherwise pass unnoticed. Lastly through the representation of

interests, women parliamentarians share the concerns of women in the community and can accordingly voice these in parliament

Those advocating for more women in parliament have credited female parliamentarians for bringing attention and focus to issues such as gender budgeting, HIV and AIDS, gender based violence, gender equality, women's relatively poor economic positions and human trafficking (The Namibian newspaper, September, 2012; IPU:2008).

As Palmieri and Jabre (2005:229) argue: "Ultimately, the need for women in politics remains unquestionable. What can be questioned is the existence and operation of a parliament without women: how can politics possibly be defined without women; how can decision-making bodies effectively address the needs of a society without the participation and involvement of half of its population".

Efforts to enhance women's political participation have gained new urgency with the designation of numbers of women in politics as an indicator of women's empowerment, as enshrined in the third United Nations' Millennium Development Goal (MDG). Measures to build women's presence in public office have been advocated by women's movements around the world for some time. Affirmative action measures to increase the numbers of women participating as public representatives in political institutions, such as quotas of women candidates or reserved seats in legislatures, have returned a growing number of women to public office.

Like most other countries, Namibia's public governance is an arena dominated by men. The greatest efforts under-taken by the government and non-governmental organizations has been

the campaign to increase the numbers of women in parliament. What has not taken place in earnest has been the critical discussion of what happens when women enter public places like parliament? What experiences do these women have and end up having that ultimately affects how they perceive their political influences to be.

The National Assembly was constituted immediately after the attainment of independence on March 21, 1990. A Constituent Assembly was established to write a constitution, considered to be one of the most liberal and gender-sensitive both regionally and internationally. In this vein, Namibia is considered to be one of the countries with the best gender policies not only in the SADC region but internationally as well. Through the Constitution, Namibia acknowledges and encourages equal power relations in all spheres of social, legal and economic life (SARDC, 2005:7). The Namibian Constitution guarantees equality of women, and recognizes the need to advance the position of women in the Namibian society. Article 10 of the Namibian Constitution states that “all persons are equal before the law and that no one should be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic group, religion, creed or social and economic status”.

Namibian women historically side lined from the structures of state that determine political and legislative priorities found an ally in the new government that took the issue of gender equality seriously and set about expending significant resources in setting up a national legal framework for the advancement of women and set about engendering the legislative process in Namibia (SARDC:2005).

Theoretically speaking, the Namibian Constitution gives women equal rights as their male counterparts to actively participate in the governance of the country. However in practice, women face issues of gender-based power imbalance and discrimination in addition to other structural, institutional, cultural and traditional barriers and roadblocks. These barriers expose

women as being inferior and second-class citizens compared with their male counterparts in terms of participation and inclusion in the governance of the country (SARDC:2005) .

Historically, women have been oppressed and dominated by the patriarchal society in Namibia and the patriarchal system still continues in other ways through culture, religion and customs (Iipinge & LeBeau: 2003). It is therefore important to have an understanding of how the Namibian parliament that is male dominated works and how the few women parliamentarians fit into the male dominated structures. As much as there is political commitment expressed from the highest levels, it is important to understand how this is being played out and how the various gender documents and pledges are working out in practice. Part of this understanding is what this research looks into by first trying to hear about the women's experiences in Parliament in their own words and how they understand their political influence to be.

Gender issues in the 2009 elections became a news-worthy topic in the local mainstream media, high-lighting stories on women's participation in politics, their placement on parties' lists and gender analysis of the political parties' manifestos.

In 2010 and 2011, the Namibian media reported on research results that found that MPs, in particular female MPs were 'neglecting their parliamentary duties by failing to speak out. An assessment of the performance of MPs showed that many do not make full use of their parliamentary seats for the benefit of society, but rather chose to remain silent and anonymous. A few months later, the media reported further that the MPs performance had not improved since its last assessment during September 2005 to 2007.

The Namibian Parliament consists of 72 MPs and out these, 20 are female MPs. According to the media reports, only 2 of the 20 female MPs were among the top 20 performers suggesting

that female politicians have not found or asserted their voice in legislative and national level decision making processes.

As for the worst performers, 2 of the 7 female MPs in the National Assembly did not make any contributions, regarding zero lines in the Hansard during the year under review. One of the mentioned MPs is from the ruling party and is one of the six non-elected and non-voting MPs appointed to Parliament by the President in terms of the Namibian Constitution Article 32 (5) (c).

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) researchers noted that if female MPs are to improve their individual rankings, they would have to do more than just introducing “Points of order”, tabling reports and engaging in ‘contentless’ interruptions in the house.

Newspaper headlines stated that female parliamentarians have been under-performing and had failed to impress when it came to debate in parliament. This damning evidence indicated that female MPs had not, on the whole distinguished themselves by their involvement and activeness in parliamentary processes.

The impression created by the newspaper stories is that the female parliamentarians are not carrying out their mandate as legislators begging the question: why are the women parliamentarians not speaking up and what happens when they enter parliament? What factors, formal or informal structures affect or hinder their participation once inside parliament? The reports raised issues of how do the female parliamentarians understand and interpret their role inside parliament? How do they perceive their political influence to be? What about parliament itself, has it transformed enough to be a gender-sensitive working environment that provides support to the parliamentarians? All these questions and more led to the search for answers on the women in parliament.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Despite the political commitment to gender equality, women's empowerment and access to the Namibian parliament, not much effort has been put in to assess or monitor what happens when women enter public spaces like parliament and how effective they are once in there. How do female parliamentarians see themselves or understand how able and effective they are once inside parliament.

A research conducted by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) in 2010 found that parliamentarians were not fulfilling their mandate by not speaking out in parliament. The IPPR study analysed the amount of contributions that members of the National Assembly made to parliamentary debate from September 2005 to October 2007 as one indicator of parliamentary performance. The principle measure used for this research was the number of lines each MP contributed to debate in the Hansard, the official record of parliament.

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) study examined the speaking records of seventy-six (76) members of the National Assembly – that is their contributions to parliamentary debates and found that a high proportion of women MPs rarely spoke in Parliament, effectively acting as “bench warmers”, (The Namibian Newspaper, April 19, 2010:1). The IPPR research found that the majority of those who were not contributing to the parliamentary debates were female MPs, in particular female backbenchers, who featured heavily in the bottom half of the table.

Female parliamentarians were accused of just introducing “Points of order”, ‘tabling reports and engaging in ‘contentless’ interruptions in the house. This kind of statement not only belittles the women in parliament but gives the impression that the female legislators are

unable to cope with working in parliament. The fact that the media reports were repeated three months later with the same sentiments still being expressed that the women in Parliament were failing in their parliamentary duties raised a number of issues that this study examines.

The IPPR research raises several serious questions such as how sensitive, conducive and supportive parliament is to women parliamentarians? Which positions do the female parliamentarians occupy in parliament? Are they able to articulate their opinions and speak freely as individuals and as representatives of the people? What factors hinder or support the female parliamentarians' performance once inside?

As representatives of the people, parliamentarians are the bridge between the electorate and the government. This unique position presents parliamentarians with an opportunity to be change agents through their representational oversight and legislative roles. It is therefore a serious concern that MPs, in particular women parliamentarians do not speak out and articulate issues on behalf of the people they represent.

Female parliamentarians and their perception of their political influence is a critical topic in reference to the continuing development of the gender equality policy in Namibia, especially with the next election coming up in 2014.

It is against this background that the study is aimed at examining how once inside Parliament, women perceive their ability to influence the Namibian political agenda and to get an understanding of their politically-related experiences. The findings and recommendations will contribute to the body of knowledge and inform policy makers on making gender equality work better within public institutions such as parliament. With the 2014 elections just around the corner, this research is timely and relevant in the quest to translate the national gender policies and commitments that the government has undertaken.

1.4 Research Questions

The main research questions that the study aims to answer are as follows:

- How do female parliamentarians perceive their political influence?
- What factors contribute to the female MPs' understanding of political influence?
- What factors hinder or support the female MPs' performance once inside Parliament?
- What role does the media play in articulating how female Parliamentarians work

1.5 The Objectives of the study

- The main objective of this research is to investigate the female parliamentarians' perceptions of their political influence and experience in the Namibian parliament.
- Understanding how Parliament as an institution functions
- How easy or difficult is it for female Parliamentarians working in a male dominated environment.
- Are female Parliamentarians able to articulate their opinions and speak freely as representatives of the people once inside Parliament?

1.6 Significance of the study

The significance of the study is to investigate how female parliamentarians in their own words perceive their political influence and what factors contribute to this understanding.

A study of this kind would contribute to policy debates about women's empowerment and participation in politics in Namibia. It is anticipated that the research and data on women parliamentarians could provide further basis for the national gender policy and other strategies designed to promote balanced participation in politics by men and women.

Parliament as the highest policy making body that decides on policy should be seen to be setting an example by upholding the very commitments that they commit the country to in the constitution. The findings of this study focuses on the female parliamentarians experiences in the National Assembly to help build up political capital which can be used to secure further advancement to help change existing rules and structures. Considering that the next elections will be held in 2014, the study would be used to assist new generations of female MPs by providing lessons learnt and finding ways of improving the participation of women in parliament. Exploring women's experiences within the Namibian parliament is thus timely and relevant to understanding their perceptions of their political influence.

This study will be of benefit to both female and male parliamentarians, those aspiring to join politics, the government as it has already committed itself to advancing and implementing the gender policy in the country through the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare.

It will also be of benefit to the various non-governmental organizations, gender activists and institutions that are working on increasing the numbers of women in parliament and other political positions.

This study intends to contribute to the local gender and political discourse and knowledge by documenting the voices of female parliamentarians as they express their views and opinions on public issues that affect their everyday political experiences.

1.7 Limitations of the study

The study covers female parliamentarians in the National Assembly. Since this is a case study, it is confined to a sample of the population, for the purpose of a thorough and in-depth analysis. The personal attitudes, own experiences of being a gender and media activist can also be another possible limitation, especially during the data collection process. However,

the researcher considers these limitations carefully to avoid compromising the results of the study.

The major constraint that was faced and which took up a lot of time was following up with some MPs who would then turn down the request for an interview due to their hectic and busy schedules. It was difficult for the Parliamentarians to avail themselves as they had prior engagements. At the time of conducting this research Parliament was on recess and most of the MPs had either gone on recess or were out working in the various regions and attending to meetings and conferences in and outside Namibia.

1.8 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is arranged according to chapters each focusing on a different theme.

The first chapter contains the introduction and background of the study, details the statement of the problem, objectives, significance and research methodology.

The second chapter focuses on the literature review and framework of the study.

The third chapter focuses on the research methodology and why the particular methodology was used.

The fourth chapter analyses in detail how the study was carried out, results presented and data analysed.

The fifth chapter presents an overview of the results, a summary of the analysis and recommendations for further research

CHAPTER 2

DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the key concepts used in the study and the literature review that explains the key concepts and the conceptual framework. It also delves further into the Government's commitment to gender equality and how the policies on gender have been implemented. The chapter looks at how parliament itself functions and how female parliamentarians perform in this environment and the challenges they face.

2.2 Literature Review

Van As (2000: 196) defines literature review as a critical summary and assessment of the range of existing literature in a given field. It may be restricted to books and papers in one discipline or sub discipline or may be wide-ranging in approach in another. Its main purpose is to situate the research to form its context or background and to provide insight into previous work. A literature review can stimulate conceptual insights and provide ideas regarding possible approaches or techniques to be applied later (Struwig and Stead: 2001: 34). The basic intention of a literature review is to give a comprehensive review of previous works on the general and specific topics considered in the report. At least to some extent, the literature review foreshadows the researcher's own study (Berg: 2001: 273).

In surveying existing research, little information addresses women's experiences in government. When looking at international literature surrounding structures aimed at women inside government, the discussions focus primarily on assessing effective methods of increasing women's participation (Norris 1994; Clark 1994; Burrell 1998). These studies

have been directed at outsiders' perceptions of women politicians in relation to government structures.

The research is interested in gathering a picture of what legislative bodies like parliament is like behind closed doors, away from the public gaze. It is important to have an understanding of how parliament functions and how the women and men function inside when they are interpreting the very laws they pass on gender equality. The IPPR research and media reports raise issues of concern of how women are not taking part in parliamentary debates and it is important to understand why this is so considering that Namibia has one of the best gender policies in Southern Africa. It is important to understand how female politicians gain or lose legitimacy, from their experiences in parliament.

There is a need therefore to understand how parliament works and where the women are positioned in parliament in order to understand why they are seen as ineffective. It is important to have an understanding of the parliamentary set up in order to understand who speaks in parliament and who is better positioned.

2.3 Definition of key concepts

Affirmative action is a policy, programme or measure that seeks to redress past discrimination against a specific group through active measures to ensure equal opportunity and positive outcomes for members of that group, in all spheres of life.

A critical mass of women in decision-making is the point at which women, through a combination of numerical strength, enabling political environments, empowerment and conviction feel able to raise critical questions in mainstream environments (Gender Links).

Effective participation means the ability to influence and change processes as a result of being part of these processes. It is possible for groups of people to be included in decision-

making processes yet have very little influence on these: being there and not there. Some of the ways in which participation can be measured include: the extent to which women occupy decision-making positions within the structure; the extent to which women exert their influence and the extent to which practices and procedures have changed as a result of women's participation (Gender Links).

Empowerment implies people – both women and men- taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills (or having their own skills and knowledge recognized), increasing self-confidence, solving problems and developing self-reliance. It is both a process and an outcome. Empowerment implies an expansion in women's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them (UN-INSTRAW).

Gender refers to social attributes that are learned or acquired during socialization as a member of a given community. Gender as opposed to sex, is the way in which society assigns characteristics and social roles to men and women. In almost all societies around the world the roles, functions and characteristics attributed to men have been accorded greater value than those of women. For example, women are assigned the private sphere, taking care of the home and family, while men are assigned the public sphere, running the affairs of society – politics. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men but to the relationship between them.

Gender analysis can be defined as the process by which the differential impact of women and men can be discerned in development. It involves a systematic collection and use of sex disaggregated data – both quantitative and qualitative – which show the different status, conditions, roles and responsibilities of women and men (National Gender Policy: 52).

Gender aware recognizes inclusiveness in terms of language pertaining to women and men, and the visual depiction of women and men as portraying a variety of roles in society, free of

stereotypical or a biased depiction of roles. Furthermore, the term implies a consciousness of mainstreaming gender wherever it is required (National Gender Policy: 53).

Gender based violence means all the acts perpetrated against women, men, girls and boys on the basis of their sex, which causes or could cause them physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or economic harm, including the threat to take acts, or undertake the imposition of arbitrary restrictions on or deprivation of fundamental freedoms in private or public life, in peace-time and during situations of armed or other forms of conflict, or in situations of natural disasters, that cause displacement of people (National Gender Policy: 2010/20)

Gender equality means that women and men have equal opportunities and enjoy the same status. It means that both can realize their full human rights, their potential to contribute to national, political, economic, social and cultural development, and that both can benefit from such results. Gender equality, therefore is the equal valuing by society of both the similarities and the differences between women and men, and the roles they play (National Gender Policy: 52).

Gender equity means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. In the development context, a gender-equity goal often requires built-in measures to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages of women.

Gender relations are concerned with how power is distributed between the sexes. They create and reproduce systematic differences in men and women's position within a given society, and define the ways in which responsibilities and claims are allocated, and how each is given value (National Gender Policy: 52).

Institutional barriers refer to the ways in which the rules, norms and practices of institutions can create and perpetuate inequalities. They can be legal and can also be based in

practice and include socio-cultural behaviours, which restrict or inhibit women's opportunities. For instance, an organization that expects its workers to routinely work overtime will discriminate against parents with responsibility for young children.

Patriarchy is a dynamic system of male dominance over women that manifests itself in, among other ways, male dominance over women's economic and social lives (Becker & Hinz: 1995: 39-47). Patriarchy as a system defines power relations between women and men, allocating a dominant role to men and a subordinate role to women. (Morna: 24).

Perception – Women's perspectives are women's views on all political concerns. Some research indicates that although broadly the same issues are significant for both sexes, women's perspectives on issues differ from those of men (Morna: 136). Based on their experiences in relation to men, women have different perceptions of issues such as politics.

Political influence is the extent to which a group or an individual or any other stakeholder can change the way political decisions are made.

Transformation is about what differences women make to the institutional culture and exercise of power as well as to the making of laws and delivery of services (SARDC: 2008: 70).

The full participation of women in the socio-political development of Namibia is not just about an issue of affirmative action and implementation of quota systems. It is a social justice and human rights issue that requires social transformation and change in the attitudes, institutional and cultural structures of the whole society.

The full participation of women means expressing the full diversity of their opinion, beliefs and experiences. Morna (2004:34) argues that representation and participation in decision-

making allows for the full spectrum of voices to be heard, experiences and values to be centre and for citizens to take responsibility for, and change their own lives.

Walby (1996:12) argues that the concept of participation does not distinguish between kinds of participation, so that the location of women in a decision making hierarchy cannot be read off from their overall level of participation. Women may be participating in an institution but be subordinated within it, for instance they may be segregated into less powerful positions.

Segregation is a very important concept in the analysis of gender relations. Segregation is the social practice in which men and women are separated from each other, usually with the dominant group taking the better positions (ibid).

According to Morna (2004:24) politics and governance tend to be associated with institutions such as parliament and the bureaucracy. Politics and governance are not just about structures. They are also about systems and processes. She further points out that, politics “is a complex aggregation of relationships involving authority and power”. Governance on the other hand, “is the science of directing states or the control and exercise of political authority over the actions and affairs of a people or a political unit”.

Morna (2004:25) argues that through socialization, not nature, women and men are allocated different and unequal roles in society. Women are assigned the private sphere, taking care of the home and family, while men are assigned the public sphere, running the affairs of the society.

When women venture into public spaces they are expected to play roles similar to the home – that is nurturing roles. Also grafted onto the gendered division of labour is a difference in power relations. Whether in the home, in the community, or in national life, men occupy the

decision-making roles. Patriarchy is the system that defines these power relations between women and men, allocating a dominant role to men and a subordinate role to women. Through the patriarchal powers vested in them by society, men become the “directors” of virtually all public life – the “face” of politics and governance.

Lovenduski and Karam (2002:125) argue that the actual impact women parliamentarians can make will depend on a number of variables, including the political context in which the assembly functions, the type and number of women who are in parliament and the rules of the Parliamentary game. Understanding political and social institutions as gendered is central to understanding the practices, ideas, goals and outcomes of politics and the dynamics of both continuity and change. A focus on gender also reveals the ways in which institutions reflect, reinforce and structure unequal gendered power relations (Mackay, 2004: 112)

Feminist theory is woman-centred in two ways. First of all the starting point of all its investigation is the situation and experience of women in society. Secondly, it seeks to describe the social world from the distinctive vantage points of women. In order to understand how the female parliamentarians are functioning in a male dominated institution, it is important to hear from the women themselves about their political experiences in Parliament. It is through listening to the women’s experiences that one is able to understand their perception of their political influence in Parliament and able to assess their effectiveness

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The research is informed by the conceptual framework first put forward by former ANC Deputy Secretary General and gender activist, Thenjiwe Mtintso. She developed a framework for analysing the transformation of gender relations in Parliament (Mtintso:1999). Mtintso’s framework focuses on access, participation and transformation. In analysing the framework,

Morna (2004: 31-34) states that the crux of Mtintso's argument is that access and numbers are a prerequisite for, but do not guarantee transformation. She argues that once women have entered political decision-making, it is necessary to remove the barriers to their effective participation.

Access in the framework, refers to the factors that bar women from entering professions and institutions. In the case of parliament, women are prevented from entering politics by the myriad of stereotypes around women emerging from the "private" domain and entering the "public" domain. Morna (ibid) argues that of all the areas of decision-making, politics is the most public of public spaces and therefore has been among the most hostile for women to access. She argues further that governments and political parties, often as a result of agitation by the women's movement, have had to institute 'special measures' to ensure women's increased participation in politics, adding that countries in Southern Africa with a history of political struggle and those with socialist leaning are more likely to institute such measures. These measures are usually cast as temporary and a means for women to "get their foot in the door".

Morna (2004: 33) suggests that participation and democracy is not only about "being there" but also contributing to change. It is just not the presence of women that will centre their views, experiences, perspectives, interests, aspirations and values but rather their effective participation. Political decision-making is fraught with obstacles for women. These include: political factors, such as support from the party and party structures; the openness of society and culture (including the media) to women in leadership; institutional factors such as leadership management roles within the institution as well as links and networks with organisations outside parliament; and personal agency, such as individual backgrounds, values and capacity.

Morna (ibid: 34) argues that transformation implies that representation and participation in decision-making allows for the full spectrum of voices to be heard, experiences and values to be centred and for citizens to take full responsibility for, and change their own lives. Once citizens who had previously been reduced to non-citizens bring “other views”, paradigms begin to change. She states that those who had always spoken on behalf of the others, assuming they know what the others feel, get challenged. Various myths are exploded and a new understanding begins. Thus when women enter decision-making, the concept, content and form of politics and governance and the way that they are practiced, begin to change leading to a shift in power relations. Outcomes begin to be informed by the new paradigm. But there is a constant struggle because the tools for transformation are often the very same institutions that need to be transformed.

The argument in this framework is that deep-seated and sustainable transformation is more likely to take place when there are both significant numbers of women in decision-making and when a conscious effort is made to facilitate their participation.

Morna (2004: 39) points out that rarely does anyone ask if men add value to decision-making. The constant need to answer the question of why women should be included and what value they bring is a reflection of a resistant environment. But answering these questions is an integral part of the struggle for gender equality, justice and democracy.

As previously recognized by other research such as Morna (2004); IPU (2008); Ballington (2009), research on women in politics has generally tended to focus on methods by which women can effectively reach governance positions. This research will explore how a specific group of Namibian women in parliament perceive their political influence and what environmental factors support or hinder their perceptions.

2.5 The Namibian Government's commitment to gender equality

In addition to the Constitution, national gender related laws and policies were enacted, such as, the Married Persons Equality Act No. 1 of 1996; the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act (No. 29 of 1998); the Maintenance Act No. 9 of 2003; Communal Land Reform Act No. 5 of 2002; Labour Act No 11 of 2007; Combating of Rape Act No. 8 of 2000; and Combating of the Domestic Violence Act No. 4 of 2003.

The Married Persons Equality Act No. 1 of 1996 was among the first of post-independence laws, specifically aimed at uplifting women's social status as women were previously considered and treated as minors. The Act specifies equality of persons within marriage and does away with the legal definition of the man as head of the house. The Act further offers alternatives to couples married in community of property that they must theoretically agree when they sell, give away or borrow against important joint assets (SARDC:2005: 10). In essence the Act provides women married in community of property equal access to bank loans and stipulates that immovable property should be registered in both spouses' names.

The Affirmative Action (Employment) Act (N0. 29 of 1998) focuses on disadvantaged groups, including the racially disadvantaged, women and the disabled. The Act aims to redress inequalities in employment and bring about equal opportunities in employment in accordance with Articles 10 and 23 of the Constitution. It aims at achieving gender balance in decision-making and fostering fairness in recruitment, selection, appointment, training and promotion and equitable remuneration for women (and for people with disabilities). The Act provides for the Employment Equity Commission (EEC) that oversees the design and implementation of the affirmative action plans.

The Maintenance Act No. 9 of 2003 gives parents a legal duty to maintain their children who are unable to support themselves. Both parents are responsible for the support of children

regardless of whether they were born inside or outside of a marriage and whether the parents are subject to any other system of customary law which may not recognise one or both parent's liability to the child. This Act provides relief for women who are most often left as the sole caregivers to children (SARDC:2005:12).The procedures on accessing child and spousal maintenance have also been clarified and simplified.

The Communal Land Reform Act No. 5 of 2002 addresses some women's rights to land in the communal areas. Under the Act, communal land must be re-allocated to a surviving spouse upon the spouse's death, while the right to remain on the land is not affected by re-marriage. If there is no surviving spouse, or if the surviving spouse does not wish to remain on the land, then it goes to "such child of the deceased person as the Chief or Traditional Authority determines to be entitled to the allocation of the right in accordance with customary law" (SARDC:2005:13).

The Labour Act No. 11 of 2007 aims at regulating the conditions of employment of all employees in Namibia without discrimination on grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed, or social or economic status, in particular ensuring equality of opportunity and terms of employment, maternity leave and job security for women (Republic of Namibia, 2007).

The Combating of Rape Act No. 8 of 2000 is aimed providing protection to victims of rape and sexual abuse and prescribes stiffer sentences for perpetrators. The offence of rape is committed if a person intentionally under coercive circumstances – including physical force, threats of force, or other circumstances where the victim is intimidated – commits or continues to commit a sexual act with another person or causes another person to commit a sexual act with the perpetrator or with a third person (Section 2, Combating of Rape Act). The Act further makes it very clear that marital rape is illegal, by stating that no marriage or

other relationship constitutes a defence to a charge of rape (Section 2 (3), Combating of Rape Act).

The Combating of the Domestic Violence Act No. 4 of 2003 provides for protection measures in domestic violence cases. The Act defines the terms 'domestic violence' and 'domestic relationships'. Various types of relationships are covered including customary or religious marriages. The definition was kept intentionally broad by qualifying acts of physical, sexual, economic, emotional, verbal or psychological abuse, as well as acts of intimidation and harassment, as domestic violence. This law gives victims of domestic violence avenues for protection, laying charges and for privacy. In theory this law allows women to freely enjoy their human rights.

The first step towards dismantling a social structure that systematically discriminates against women is legal reform. As noted by SARDC (2005:9) at independence there were 13 laws that favoured men over women. Therefore the significance of the legal frameworks listed above, is that women's previously disadvantaged position is recognised and encourages the implementation of affirmative action policies that advance women's social status and roles within society. The attempts at improving law enforcement and judicial responses to violations of women's rights have gone a long way towards guaranteeing women more equitable protection in Namibia and upholding the principles of gender equality.

Apart from the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, which exhorts the concept of gender equality, the government has assented to several international, continental and regional instruments for the promotion of gender equality such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which parliament approved in 1992; the CEDAW Optional Protocol, ratified in 2000; the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; the UN Convention against Transnational Crime and Prevent, Suppress and Punish

Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (the Palermo Protocol); the Protocol to the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and the African Regional Platform for Action; all of which adhered to the ideal of gender equality. Namibia is a signatory to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and SADC Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women and Children (SARDC: 2005: 8).

These documents have contributed to the Namibian national plan for gender equality and provided guidelines for all national gender programmes. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) form the basis for the current gender policies and programmes in Namibia. The Department of Women's Affairs (DWA), which later became the Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare (MWACW), has been guided by the National Communication Strategy in Support of the UN CEDAW, while the DWA and later the MWACW have been tasked with the implementation of the CEDAW. Many of the provisions in the UN CEDAW – such as the definition of discrimination, policy measures to end gender discrimination and affirmative action provisions – parallel and reinforce those established in Namibia's constitution. The implementation of the UN CEDAW document occurred at the same time as the introduction of the Beijing Platform for Action. All of these international documents provide the basis for the domestication of gender equality at the political structural level and lay the basis for nationally and locally generated definitions of the globalized gender equality movement (Lebeau & Ipinge: 2003).

The First National Gender Policy was compiled and adopted in 1997 marking an important step towards the attainment of gender equality in Namibia. The Namibian Parliament

adopted the National Gender Policy and its Plan of Action as a guiding document to enable line Ministries to mainstream gender into their programmes and policies. The policy had identified ten critical areas of concern. It was aimed at closing the gaps of inequality between women and men, which were created by past socio-economic, political and cultural inequalities which existed in the Namibian society. In 2009, the Namibian government in consultation with relevant stakeholders, embarked upon the process of revising the 1997 National Gender Policy and in 2012, on International Women's Day, March 8, the President officially launched the Namibian National Gender Policy covering the period from 2010 to 2020. In keeping with international developments, the focus areas covered in the revised policy have been expanded to 12, as opposed to 10 in the initial 1997 policy. The National Gender Policy was designed with the objective to effectively contribute to the attainment of the objectives of Vision 2030, in order to create a society in which women and men enjoy equal rights and access to basic services (National Gender Policy:2010/20).

Namibia has two national documents and several gender policies and programmes that guide political structural discourses on gender equality. The National Gender Policy (NGP) articulates the government's rationale for its gender policy, while the National Gender Plan of Action (NGPA) extrapolates on the government's proposed methods for achieving a gender balance in power-sharing and decision-making (SARDC:2005: 55).

Namibia's Vision 2030 also identifies long-term national development plans. Vision 2030 has as its stated aim: 'to mainstream gender in development, to ensure that women and men are equally heard and given equal opportunities and treatments to exercise their skills and abilities in all aspects of life'. Vision 2030 includes implementing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating progress on gender issues; involving traditional leaders in gender-sensitive programmes; addressing misconceptions about gender and changing discourses in

gender ideologies; implementing gender policies and programmes; undertaking gender analysis of data; and building the capacity of researchers, trainers and planners in gender research (Ipinge and LeBeau:2003:71).

Significantly, Vision 2030 identifies a major area where differences can be seen between men and women as access to resources and decision-making. Vision 2030 further recognizes that ‘before independence, women were poorly represented in all positions of influence. Only two women occupied senior positions in civil services’ and calls on government and civil society to embark upon a plan to address imbalances between men and women in decision-making positions’ (SARDC:2005: 55)

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Despite women representing 52% of the electorate and a commitment by the SWAPO leadership to enhance gender equality in politics, the 2009 Presidential and Parliamentary elections saw a decrease in the numbers among female parliamentary representatives from 18 to 16 with a mere 22% of the seats captured (The Namibian newspaper: September, 2012). The Namibian Parliament saw only 16 women and 56 men elected to Parliament to fill the 72 seats. Namibia may have once been touted as likely to meet the thirty per cent and later the fifty percent SADC gender requirement, but the fact that there is no legislative quota for women at the national level has led to the poor showing of women on some of the major political parties’ lists contributing to the unfavourable direction for women in politics and decision-making in Parliament.

The Namibian newspaper of September 12, 2012, quoted the SWAPO Secretary General as saying that the ruling Party had failed over the past ten years to implement a 50/50 gender representation in decision-making bodies, despite it being one of the resolutions adopted at its 2002 and 2007 party congresses.

Despite the gender commitments made and undertaken, the debate on the Married Persons Equality Bill in parliament shows that the struggle for national liberation did not create a depth of awareness on gender issues in Namibia. On 20 May 1996, the then President Sam Nujoma, signed the Married Persons' Equality Bill, which then became law as Act No. 1 of 1996. The Married Persons' Equality Act fulfilled one of the main demands of the post-Independence Namibian women's movements, as it did away with the husband's automatic "marital power" and his position as the "head of the family". Under Roman-Dutch Common Law, these powers were vested in the husband in every civil law marriage in Namibia before the passing of the Act (Becker: 2003:171).

According to Becker (ibid), the drafting and parliamentary debate of the Married Persons' Equality Bill caused a long and highly controversial discussion in Namibian politics and society. The opponents employed "African tradition" and the Bible for their cause: according to the commands of both African "tradition" and Christianity, women and men could never be equal, or so their arguments went. It must be noted that the public opposition was staged exclusively by male parliamentarians, writers, callers and discussants. No women's voices were ever raised publicly against the proposed reform. However, there were also Namibian men who supported the Married Persons' Equality Bill. Several high-ranking male politicians and influential Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) publicly expressed support for the proposed new legislation. In the end, President Nujoma threw his personal weight behind the contested reform. Whether they liked it or not, all SWAPO parliamentarians were compelled to vote in favour of the new law, which was then finally passed in the National Assembly. The vote in the NA overruled the reservations of the National Council, the second house of Parliament, representing regional Government delegates (ibid: 172) This illustration according to some commentators is that the women in parliament were unable to get the support from the men and had to rely on the President to ensure that the bill was passed.

Parliaments are organised and operate according to established rules, processes and norms that have historically been determined by men. When women enter parliament therefore, they typically enter domains which operate along gender lines – a political environment where the inherent institutional culture and traditions may be biased against them. This can affect how political representation works in practice. Removing the barriers to women’s participation is therefore crucial for creating gender-friendly parliaments that respond to the needs and interests of both men and women. (IPU: 2008: 71).

Lovenduski and Karam (2002: 125) suggest that in parliament, women enter a male domain. Parliaments were established, organised and dominated by men, acting in their own interest and establishing procedures for their own convenience. There was no deliberate conspiracy to exclude women. It was not even an issue. Lovenduski and Karam point out that most established parliaments were a product of political processes that were male-dominated or exclusively male. Subsequent legislatures were, for the most part, modelled on these established assemblies. Inevitably, these male-dominated organisations reflect certain male biases, the precise kind varying from country and culture.

Parliaments are work places that have been shaped primarily by men. They remain organisations that follow long-held traditions, including the timetable of sitting days and the times for debates and hearings. Parliamentary cultures often emphasize a club-like atmosphere where work inside the building is to be prioritised over other responsibilities. A key challenge is therefore to identify those aspects of the organization of parliamentary work that can be re-organised and updated to accommodate the needs of both women and men (IPU: 2008:72).

It is important to also recognize that male dominated institutions like parliament can enhance the individuals that work in them, or they can marginalize them even further. Morna (2004:

84) argues that man-made political decision-making structures are often intimidating to women. And they do not change overnight because women have arrived.

Parliament is a political institution. It is a place for political, and often confrontational, debate. But it is also a place where, at the end of the day, national policies are forged and conflicts in society are resolved through dialogue and compromise. As such, parliament is a complex institution. It functions at different levels and many actors influence what it does. Members of parliament, the Speaker and leadership, political parties and groups, Secretaries General, clerks and administration all play a part in shaping its work (Rodgers & Walter: 2006:100).

Namibia's government comprises the three branches (legislative, judiciary and executive) with a popularly elected President who is both head of state and head of the executive, and an appointed Prime Minister. The national legislature is a bicameral parliament which consists of the National Assembly and the National Council, together forming the Legislative arm of Government (Parliament of Namibia:2003).

The Namibian National Assembly was established in terms of Article 44 of the Namibian Constitution as the highest law-making body of the country. The Namibian parliament is bicameral in nature, consisting of the National Assembly (NA), lower house and the National Council. The NA was constituted immediately after the attainment of independence on 21 March 1990.

The NA has 72 members elected every five years under a closed list, proportional representation electoral system and six non-voting members appointed by the President. The President appoints the six extra members for their special expertise, status and skill. These six members do not have voting rights (Hopwood: 2006: 19).

The NA is established in terms of Chapter 7 of the Constitution which gives 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).

The NA is expected to approve budgets and taxation regimes, defend the Constitution and laws of Namibia, agree to international treaties, receive reports of government agencies and parastatals, and remain vigilant in ensuring the scourges of apartheid, colonialism and tribalism do not manifest themselves in Namibia (ibid: 23-24).

The NA also gives the opposition MPs the opportunity to hold the Prime Minister and Ministers accountable by posing questions relating to matters for which they are responsible. Matters that MPs want to be discussed by the NA can be introduced in the form of a motion that is debated and eventually voted on (ibid).

The President is not a member of the NA but does deliver an annual State of the Nation address after which parliamentarians are allowed to ask questions. The Speaker is chosen by MPs presides over sittings of the NA and has the authority to make rulings concerning the conduct of proceedings. The Speaker acts as a spokesperson for the NA in its dealings with the State, the President. The Speaker also has a casting vote in the case of ties. Chief Whips are chosen by MPs from their political parties. They are responsible for maintaining discipline among their party’ MPs (Hopwood: 2006:24).

Article 59 of the Constitution (1990) provides for the establishment of parliamentary standing committees, with among others the duty to perform an oversight role over the Executive. Parliamentary committees are widely recognized to be important arenas for legislative deliberations. Committees scrutinize bills, the work of the Executive as well as carrying out public consultations on proposed policies referred to them.

Standing Committees are groups of MPs from all parties who scrutinize bills and other documents in detail. The committees are drawn from MPs who are not ministers, deputy ministers and are appointed by the Speaker of the NA. They usually handle specific issues such as human resources or economics. They can ask for input from experts and hold public hearings. The committee can suggest changes to a bill as part of its findings. Sometimes a Select Committee is set up to deal with a particular matter before the NA (ibid).

Much of the work of parliaments is done through parliamentary committees. Legislation committees conduct detailed examination of bills from Parliamentary committees and play a vital role in the parliamentary system. It is in committees where much of the parliamentary work takes place; they debate policies that help make better laws informed by public choices. Committees are critical spaces for both the parliamentarians and the citizens who are given the opportunity to interact with the legislature (IPU: 2008: 62). Committees are seen as the primary space where women parliamentarians can raise issues and are important spaces for providing opportunities for influencing the political agenda and raising gender issues (Angevine:2006: iii)

The IPPR research pointed out that the Namibian National Assembly consists of 72 voting members plus the additional six appointed by the President, bringing the total to 78. Out of the 78, 25 are Cabinet members which include the Prime Minister, the Deputy and Ministers. 20 are Deputy Ministers bringing the total to 45, which means 63% of MPs belong to the Executive and 43% are ordinary MPs or backbenchers. Namibia has never had a female speaker – which is the most senior parliamentary position but has a female Deputy Speaker. Out of the 55 SWAPO MPs, 38 hold ministerial or deputy minister posts, leaving 17 SWAPO members who can safely be described as backbenchers (IPPR: 2010).

The IPPR research revealed that the Backbencher as the term implies is an MP who sits at the back benches and does not hold any ministerial positions. The role of the back bencher is to mainly support the front benchers. In the Namibian set up, the backbenchers are even out of the view of the public and press galleries. The IPPR research notes that non-performing members are more noticeable simply because they are so few in numbers and noted that women backbenchers featured heavily in the bottom half of the table of those who fared poorly in parliamentary debates.

The reasons advanced by the IPPR research for the poor performance of the backbenchers is that some SWAPO MPs feel constrained by being junior politicians in a party that dominates parliament. It may be that some MPs are concerned not to be seen stepping out (the party) line and therefore prefer to keep quiet. It is easier for SWAPO MPs to hide when there are 55 of them.

Given that the numbers of backbenchers in the NA are so low, MPs have to spread themselves very thinly and have to serve on multiple committees. This has implications on the amount of work that can be undertaken and the quality of scrutiny of any one issue that can be applied by anyone individual. It consequently comprises the overall quality and output of the committees and influence on the level of oversight parliament can exercise regarding the legislative process (IPPR: 2010).

Hopwood (2006:23) raises an important issue about the separation of power when he says that there is an argument that the legislative power has been subsumed by executive power because of SWAPO's dominance in parliament. He bases this on the high proportion of the SWAPO MPs who serve on the executive and an electoral system in which most MPs are primarily accountable to their parties rather than the electorate. Hopwood suggests that instead of being accountable to the voters in a direct and transparent manner, MPs are more

likely to be accountable to their party. In addition, if they take an independent stance on issues or raise matters brought to their attention through lobbying from the public, they face the possibility of being missed off the party list for the next election. In Namibia where many MPs do not have alternative careers because of limited opportunities during the apartheid era, the prospect of losing an MP's salary is a serious one (Hopwood: 2006: 47).

Morna (2003: 98) argues that parliaments were established, organised and dominated by men, acting in their own interest and establishing procedures for their own convenience. Parliaments have often been described as confrontational workplaces, characterized by political maneuvering, aggressive debates and a general lack of gender sensitivity. The behavior and attitudes of both male and female parliamentarians tended to have sexist undertones. Nearly all the parliaments in Southern Africa even the Lusophone countries, come out of the Westminster tradition of the "gentleman's club". The masculinity of parliament is reflected in many ways: the facilities, the way it operates, its rules, culture and environment. As Morna observed; Parliament should be in the forefront of creating a climate of intolerance to prejudices and of customary and other practices that perpetrate the belief in male superiority and female inferiority. Parliament needs to send a clear message to the nation that values that carry prejudices against women need to be assessed and changed.

In reviewing existing literature, little information addresses women's experiences inside parliament. Research generally has tended to focus on the numbers of women and how to increase access to parliament (IPU: 2008: iii). The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has for years been conducting research and surveys around women in parliaments and it is through their various conferences and workshops that an insight into how women perform in parliament is given. It is noted in the IPU report (2008: iii) that ever since the first UN world conference on Women was held in Mexico City in 1975, the international community has paid great attention to women's representation in, and impact on, political decision-making

structures. However as noted by other research not much research has gone into finding out what happens when women are inside parliament and how they actually perform as women and as individual members of parliament.

Ballington (2009:81) points out that since the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, there has been much emphasis placed on women's access to parliaments and how to increase the numbers of women elected. There has been some research into the effectiveness and influence of women in parliaments too, but less attention has been paid to the gendered nature of political institutions, particularly parliament, how they function in practice and how they are indeed 'gendered' institutions.

(Markham: 2012) indicates that data about women's political participation is under collected, so there has been a tendency to rely on the number of women in office as an imperfect but important measurement of gender equality. However according to Morna & Nyakurajah (2003: 24), it is important to note that being preoccupied with numbers does not tell the whole story and it is as important to look at the gender discourse and begin to go beyond the numbers.

2.6 Challenges faced by female parliamentarians

2.6.1 The issue of culture

One of the overarching challenges highlighted in some of the literature reviewed is the prevailing cultural attitudes regarding the roles of women and men in society. These affect the nature and forms of women's political participation and impact their levels of success in seeking and maintaining positions of power. Cultural attitudes affect not only how women are perceived by the electorate, but also by political party leaders and the media (IPU: 2008: 1).

Cultural attitudes also impact on how women see themselves, affecting their confidence and resolve to pursue a political career.

A research focusing on Namibia, notes that many people continue to use “tradition”, “custom” and “culture” to justify patriarchy and suggest that the biggest barrier to gender-equality remains the discriminatory attitudes of men (SARDC: 2005:3). The same research pointed out that “a survey of voters attitudes during the 1992 elections shared that almost 25% of the respondents, men and women alike, said they would not vote for a woman candidate, the reason being that women are not suitable for public office”.

It is clear, that while Namibia has made substantive gains in ensuring that women attain equal status to men, centuries of patriarchy have ensured deep-rooted inequality and discrimination against women in attitudes, perceptions and behaviour. The struggle to turn the tide on this historic inheritance remains of paramount importance to Namibia (LeBeau & Iiping: 2003).

Halder (2004:31) in her article argues that while most research on gender inequality in political representation has pointed out that political, socio-economic and cultural factors each play a role in accounting for cross-national variation, culture remains the most influential factor (Moore and Shackman, 1996; Paxton, 1997; Matland, 1998b; Kenworthy & Malami, 1999). A US Congresswoman, Jeane J. Kirkpatrick (1974: 14-5) attributed significant weight to culture. She stated: “Politics, it is argued, is a good example of arbitrary cultural exclusion. While legal barriers to women’s participation in political life have been abolished, cultural norms have preserved the definition of politics as “man’s work.” Culture is often said to affect women’s political behaviour by depriving them of the self-esteem necessary for political leadership. In a culture which values the male more highly than the female, women may never acquire the confidence and autonomy required to seek power or wield it effectively”.

2.6.2 The Public vs Private

The second set of challenges faced by women in parliament is the question of the public vs private domain. Walby (1996: 3) suggests that it is important to acknowledge the importance of men's agency in theorizing gender relations. Men have often been active in building institutions which suit their needs rather than those of women. Men's traditionally greater access to and involvement in the public sphere has typically given them greater opportunities for effective collective agency than have traditionally been available to women. Men have often been active in building institutions which suit their needs rather than those of women. Men's traditionally greater access to and involvement in the public sphere has typically given them greater opportunities for effective collective agency than have traditionally been available to women.

Angevine (2006: 11) points out that the contested notion of the public space for men and the private space for women in a society has been raised in prior research aimed at women in government. Authors such as (Strivers 1993, Boyd 1997, Bochel and Bochel 2000) describe how women in government face particular difficulties when entering the 'public' space of government.

Angevine (ibid) further states that the 'private' sphere as a space for women primarily stems from the Western notions of femininity (Boyd: 1997). According to Boyd (1997), women are socialized into the 'private' sphere. Boyd's 'private' sphere consists of what she considers 'domestic' responsibilities: the home, the family and sexuality. Men are responsible for the public sphere, such as working outside the home, public affairs and economic decision-making.

Morna (2004:80) argues that no matter how gender sensitive, decision-making structures in the region have become, many women still find there is a mismatch between the freedom they have found or created in the work place, and the patriarchal regimes at home. Morna quotes a senior Officer at the SADC Parliamentary Forum (PF) as stating that “you can’t claim a public victory if you have no private victory. You get home and you are a subordinate. You have a dual personality. A lot of women struggle with equality because they don’t have power within”.

Kiamba (2008) states that African women have certain expected roles to play. They are expected to bear and nurture children, as well as manage the home. At the same time, today’s African woman is expected to earn a living and contribute to the running of society (BBC News, 2005). In short, Gwendolyn Mikell (1997) referred to contemporary African women as walking a political/gender tightrope, but it is also a leadership and gender tightrope.

Balancing public and private responsibilities was noted as a challenge for many female parliamentarians. Although it was noted that both men and women have multiple commitments that are time consuming and can make it difficult to pursue a political career, the challenge of balancing family and public responsibilities was often felt hardest by women. The support of family was seen as crucial for women with political ambitions (IPU, 2008: iii)

2.6.3 Political parties as the gate keepers

All politicians face dilemmas at one time or the other over divergences between political party positions and their own convictions. Women in politics often feel these tensions more acutely because of the expectation that they represent women (IPU: 2009).

In Namibia, where SWAPO has boosted representation of women through its quota and the PR system, the majority of women are SWAPO cadres. Lister Chaka from the NGO ALAN is quoted in Morna (2004: 79) as saying that the women in SWAPO think twice about making comments that would be detrimental to their party.

The women in parliament are there because of their political parties, that is why they toe the line. A Namibian participant in a gender study called 'Ring up the changes' (2003: 75) is quoted as saying that they had not gone beyond party lines. "You have to speak according to your party. There are issues of a common nature, but we have not learned to deal with them commonly".

Morna (2004) quotes a South African MP who states that male leadership also invariably selects which women are promoted within which party structures and within parliament. They decide who sits on what committee and who gets speaking time in the house, on what and when survival instincts triumph, men are the game, they control the game.

Morna (ibid) quotes several women from various SADC countries who stressed that if a member takes a different line to that of her party, she stands the risk of being regarded as challenging the leader and might face disciplinary proceedings. Political parties do not practice what they preach where gender equality is concerned. Some of the key internal factors that can help or hinder the effectiveness as what happens within the party has a bearing on the ability of women to function effectively (Morna: 2003:75).

Political parties were identified as the main gatekeepers to elected office, but often did not seem to be doing enough to promote and support the candidatures of women. Political parties were largely seen as operating as men's clubs where women have yet to make their way. They were criticized for often overlooking the value of women candidates, and opting for the

safety of male incumbents rather than taking the perceived risk of supporting women aspirants (IPU: 2009: 8).

An analysis by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) on the political parties that have seats in the fifth Namibian Parliament showed that while all political parties have made promises on gender issues, there is no implementation plan and as such, there has been minimal impact for women's representation starting from 1989 (The Namibian newspaper, 2012).

According to the Namibian newspaper report that quoted Iipinga (2012) "although women are active in the political parties, it seems political parties only use them for votes and organisation as well as to attend rallies".

The Namibian and New Era newspapers (2012) indicate that the study was presented at a meeting organised for political parties represented in the Fifth Parliament of Namibia to analyse policy documents from a gender perspective in Namibia. The objective was to examine the role of political parties in achieving gender equality and diversity in political leadership and decision making.

Media reports (The Namibian, Southern Times and New Era, August, 2012) reported that according to lobbyists, Namibia's political parties have paid a lot of lip service and demonstrated a lack of commitment to mainstreaming gender issues and incorporating women in leadership positions.

The analysis showed that so far, no political party in Namibia has ever been headed by a woman, neither have women dominated the top party leadership structures. In Namibia, the highest office a woman has held is that of Deputy Prime Minister which was held by Dr Libertine Amathila (2005-2010). The report points out that some political parties have written

rules and procedures for elections into the highest decision-making positions, but that those rules are gender-blind and tend to favour men at the expense of women. The rules do not have specific provision for women's election to leadership.

According to media reports, political parties' policy documents contained few details and largely generalised promises about promoting gender equality. It stated, "Political party elitism and the male dominance make it difficult for women to enter into politics as knowledge gets divided". "Information within political parties seems to be confined and controlled by the top leaders who are mostly male. It seems political parties only use women for votes and organisations as well as attending rallies," reads the analysis. The analysis states that patriarchal attitudes restrict women's access to political party structures and prevents change, especially regarding women's political leadership.

There is also contention that the symbols of the political parties send campaign messages in favour of men as the key players in politics and decision-making. While it is recognised that political parties have a representative democratic system, the study points out that the outcomes of internal party elections do not reflect the membership base of the electorate.

An important mention made by the researchers was that the vast majority of the political parties analysed exhibited a subtle gender bias as seen from their party symbols and logos which depicted male supremacy. Specific examples given were that of the SWAPO logo depicting a man with his fist in the air, and that of NUDO. The only party logo that promoted gender equality was that of the RDP which depicts both a man and woman with fists in the air. The APP party flag does not have a logo depicting gender differentiation (The Namibian Newspaper, August 2012).

The analysis was done with information derived from political parties' manifestos and constitutions. The objective was to examine the role of political parties in achieving gender equality and diversity in political leadership and decision making. The findings reveal that political party documents contained few details and many generalised promises about promoting gender equality, with the exception of the RP that has not covered gender issues in their manifesto at all.

Norris (1997: 218) points out that one can develop organising capacity, decision-making techniques, lobbying and other political manners while working for a political party. Parties offer power both through access to public office and in the party organisation itself; they also make useful ties between public officials and voters. They exercise extensive influence in nominating candidates for parliamentary elections. Party affiliation is extremely important for women to overcome typical societal discrimination.

Political parties are not only sources of power and influence but are regarded as gatekeepers because they have the power to nominate candidates. The central party organizations have considerable influence over the nomination of candidates, and if they are committed to include more women, they have that option. Hague et al., (1998:82) described how women are treated by political parties: "of course, women still face the high hurdle of discrimination from sexist male politicians". These gatekeepers claim that women are 'unsuited' to politics and then use the scarcity of women in high office to prove their point!

Women's share of legislative seats may also be affected by the partisan composition of the legislature. Morna (2004:64) recognizes that political parties play a critical role in "opening the door" for women to enter and participate in decision-making. After all, in parliamentary systems, it is only through political parties that anyone can be elected into office.

Morna (2009:75) indicates that women in opposition parties face an even tougher challenge, both from their male colleagues but also from women and men in the ruling parties. It is difficult enough for society to come around to the idea of women in politics, let alone in opposition. There are very few women in opposition in SADC politics and they face unique challenges. She quotes an opposition female MP who states that “it is very difficult for a woman in opposition. You are always at the bottom of the list. Men behave like you cannot stand up and lead. And if you are seen to seek support from women in the ruling party you are seen as a sell-out”.

2.6.4 Under-representation of women and the critical mass

The greatest focus has been on the number of female representation. Most of the literature reviewed Morna (2004; 2007); Ballington (2009); Norris & Inglehart (2008) concur on the importance and need to have a critical mass of women in parliament.

Research indicates that to have a significant impact on the culture of an organization, women must occupy at least one-third of the available space – the target referred to as the “critical mass of women.”

IPU (2008: 54) point out that the critical mass theory is the widely accepted framework that suggest women are substantively represented when their numbers reach a certain level, at which point institutions and policies will start to be transformed.

The critical mass of women, of at least 30 per cent, was important for several reasons. In parliaments with low numbers of women members, there sometimes are not enough women to take part in all parliamentary committees, or women have to spread themselves thinly taking on several committee assignments.

A critical mass of women members is also needed to begin to change political priorities and place women's concerns on the parliamentary agenda.

Ensuring that both women and men will be able to influence decisions and resource allocations requires going beyond simply increasing the number of women in different positions, to providing real opportunities for influencing the agendas, institutions and processes of decision-making. This calls for special attention to the values, norms, rules, procedures and practices in parliament to ensure that, once they are elected, women can apply their unique and diverse perspectives.

Norris and Ingelhart (2008) argue that the persistent under-representation of women is a matter of concern because this may have important consequences for the public policy agenda and for the articulation of women's concerns, as well for the democratic legitimacy of elected bodies, for human rights and for public confidence in government. However not much research nor literature exists that explores how women perform or perceive their effectiveness in contributing to the political landscape once inside the parliament. Angevine (2006: iii) notes that aside from the work of Hassim (2003) and Pandoor (1999), little academic research explores the experiences of women.

The informal structures of Parliament, such as socializing spaces, and gender stereotypes, such as the responsibility of women Parliamentarians for 'women's issues' have been identified as some of the primary obstacles that hinder the women Parliamentarian's political influence (IPU:2008: 8).

Gender stereotyping pervades all levels of Namibian society. Gender roles are narrowly defined through social institutions that include the family, church, schools and culture. Namibia is socially conservative and holds strong traditional beliefs and practices (Muhato, 2003:5).

Pandoor (1999: 27) suggests that parliament was an institution shaped by men and this affects women's experiences. The organizational arrangements around working hours, childcare, bathroom facilities and social events are based on the needs of men. Although there are studies examining the methods of developing a stronger representation of women in governments, there is little research investigating the impact of these numbers for the women inside.

There is little research on how women perceive their ability to influence the political agenda once inside governmental structures. There is a great deal of research addressing ideas to engage more women into governance, electoral politics, surrounding quotas, campaigning and the impact of critical mass (Angevine, 2006:7).

Equality in representation is a key indicator of gender transformation within the private and public sector, and it is critical that Namibia pursues its commitment to ensuring equal representation in leadership. As stated by Hicks in the Mercury newspaper (2010:2) merely securing more women in parliament, on company boards of directors or among upper echelons of management on its own is not adequate as it has become apparent that there are invisible elements that continue to marginalize women, related to the institutional culture within these demonstratedly male-dominated environments. These are witnessed within internal policies and practice, such as recruitment policy, access to skills training and promotion, the addressing of sexual harassment, and the sense that men are taken more seriously and women have to "earn their stripes".

2.6.5 The Media's portrayal of Women in Parliament

There are many views regarding why it is important to have women in parliament and why their portrayal by the media matters. Arguments range from the utility of women

parliamentarians serving as role models to improving the general status of women in society. The potential of the media to act as an image-setting instrument and as a tool to be used more effectively by women candidates has been acknowledged by the UN Commission of Women (UN Department of Economics, 2006: 29).

Do female politician and male politicians get an equal treatment in the media? Are the media neutral in their portrayal of politicians regarding gender, or are they circulating gender stereotypes? How is the representation of politicians linked to the question of the quality of journalism? Initially, quality in the context of gendered representation may be defined as the aim to reflect diverse social reality in programme content (van Cuilenburg: 1998: 41) and thus to contribute to a better world (Mulgan 1990: 28-29). The media, after all, are among the main, if not the most important institutions, that can change attitudes regarding gender and raise awareness about gender issues. Furthermore, the media, and television in particular, currently constitute the real public space through which citizens understand the “political” (Corner & Pels: 2003). If the media articulate the political, then the ways in which women and men are portrayed, their access to media, and their visibility as political agents in the media certainly matter.

The mass media are often called the fourth branch of power because of their influence on public opinion and public consciousness. The media in any society have at least two roles: as a chronicler of current events; and as an informer of public opinion, thereby fostering different points of view. Often, the mass media tend to minimize coverage of events and organizations of interest to women. The media do not adequately inform the public about the rights and roles of women in society; nor do they usually engage in measures to promote or improve women’s position. Most of the world’s media have yet to deal with the fact that women, as a rule, are the first to be affected by political, social and economic changes and reforms taking place in a country, for example, they are among the first to lose their jobs. The

fact that women are largely alienated from the political decision-making process is also ignored by the media.

The media can be used to cultivate gender biases and promote a stereotype about 'a woman's place', helping conservative governments and societies to put the blame on women for the failure in family policy, and to reinforce the idea that women are responsible for social problems, such as divorce and the growth of minor crime, getting worse. Another widespread trend in the mainstream media is to depict women as beautiful objects: women are identified and objectified according to their sex, and are made to internalize certain notions of beauty and attractiveness which relate more to a woman's physical capacities than to her mental faculties. Such an approach encourages the long-standing patriarchal stereotype of the 'weaker sex', where women are sexual objects and 'second-class' citizens.

Admittedly, the mass media also tell stories about women politicians and about businesswomen and their successes, but this kind of coverage is rare and infrequent and often appear on 'special pages' or on special events such as "Women's day", inside the newspaper, rarely as a headline.

The presentation of topics such as fashion competitions, film stars, art and the secrets of eternal youth is more typical. Not surprisingly, such views hardly promote women's sense of self-worth and self-respect or encourage them to take on positions of public responsibility.

The mass media tend to minimize coverage of events and organizations of interest to women. Practically speaking, if there is lack of proper coverage of women's issues and the activities of women MPs, this contributes to a lack of public awareness about them, which in turn translates into a lack of constituency for women MPs. The mass media still need to recognize the equal value and dignity of men and women.

Often the media miss these stories because reporting on politics and elections, like many other issues, still remains gender-blind. The media fall short of their own accountability role, which is to work and report in the interest of the public, when women are not given equal access to voice their opinions and views as news sources and when women politicians and candidates are rendered invisible or only covered in stereotypical ways.

Mainstream media has failed to portray the true image of women despite the fact that women have made entries into areas which were once treated as male dominated bastion. Mainstream media have been reinforcing the traditional stereotype image of submissive, sacrificing women, perpetuating the status quo. Morna and Nyakurajah (2010:220) have identified that the media has been one of the less hotly contested yet critical areas of concern in the lobbying and advocacy on the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. They also point out that gender activists have long recognised the critical importance of the media in changing attitudes and mind sets, but have not known how to engage with the fourth estate.

An IPU study on barriers to women's political participation showed that 14% of women parliamentarians described their relationship with the media as good and 53% as average. While 33% were unhappy about their relationship with the media. (IPU: 2000:45).

The potential of the media to act as an 'image-setting instrument and as a tool to be used more effectively by women candidates' has been acknowledged by the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006:233), discussing female politicians in the United States, stress that the presence of women politicians increases the likelihood of girls being interested in politics. However, they highlight that this is not due to a belief about whether or not politics is an appropriate forum for women but rather that visible women candidates sponsor conversations between parents and their daughters about politics. They conclude that: 'The presence of visible female role models apparently transforms political

socialization for girls by making politics a more likely topic of conversation in their home. A highly visible woman politician in the future has the potential to generate significant interest in political activity among adolescent girls with possibly long-term effects on the political engagement of women'. This suggests that the potential repercussions of the way women politicians are portrayed in the media are significant.

Nonetheless, some commentators are concerned that media coverage of women politicians still differs to that of male politicians. Various reports such as the Media Monitoring Project (2000; 2005) demonstrate that there has not been a total shift from the traditional focus on their appearance and style, as well as details of their personal lives – marital status, childcare arrangements, etc.

According to Baird (2004: 36) it is easy to dissect and dismiss the individual experiences of women MPs, but when viewed collectively it is clear that a specific way of viewing women has frequently interfered with the way they are seen and the progress of their careers.

The fact remains that the position of women is more tenuous and their grasp on power more slippery by virtue of their gender and the intense scrutiny – both sympathetic and hostile – of the media.

As one of the most powerful tools for politicians and for social awareness, the media is a critical factor in the efficacy of women in politics. The media can either reinforce stereotypes of women belonging only in the home, or it can help to normalize the idea of women occupying public spaces.

Morna (2004) suggests that all politicians have a love-hate relationship with the media. For women in politics, their relationship is that much more troubled. The issues confronting women politicians and the media are two-fold. The first is that they are for the most part simply ignored. The Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS:2003) carried out by MISA

and Gender Links showed that while on average women comprise 19.4% of members of parliament in the SADC region, only eight per cent of politicians whose views were sought for comment are women. In Namibia, the GMBS study found that men constituted 81% of the news sources with women only accounting for 19% (GMBS; 2003 :). It further revealed that women's voices were almost completely absent in certain occupational categories including politics, religion, science, technology and sport.

The Gender and Media Progress Study (GMPS: 2010:16) noted that there has been a marginal increase of one percent in the proportion of women sources in the news in Namibia from 19 per cent in the 2003 GMBS to 20 per cent in the GMPS.

The second is due to the extent that the views of women in politics are sought, they are invariably trivialized. Morna (2003:83) quotes the 1999 Media Monitoring Study which states that 'Women entering the political sphere provide the news media with a 'problem'. They embody a challenge to masculine authority. They also defy easy categorization. The scrutiny of women's work in our society, therefore, is closely tied to their traditionally defined roles as 'women'. Their images fit in well with prevailing cultural perceptions of women. These images also help maintain the patriarchal structure by inculcating restricted and limited images of women".

Women are regularly demonized and branded as 'unfeminine' or 'iron women' – ruthless, belligerent and doggedly determined' (IPU: 2009:45).

The Namibian media notably the Namibian newspaper and the New Era newspaper ran stories of how female parliamentarians have been performing in parliament based on a research conducted by the IPPR that found that female parliamentarians were failing in their duties in parliament. Newspaper articles in the Namibian newspaper and New Era dated April 19, 2010 focused on the research written by Ellison Tjirera and Graham Hopwood, that

some Members of Parliament had been accused of doing a little more than ‘warming the seats’ in the National Assembly because of their perceived low contribution to parliamentary debates.

The local mainstream media in Namibia that took up the IPPR research focused their attention on the female parliaments without carrying out any further assessment on the causes and the implications. The repeated comments made by the researchers that the female parliamentarians were merely “warming the benches” and making “contentless” interruptions, seem to agree with the contention that the media will highlight the negatives against women in order to ‘confirm’ their story that women cannot lead. The male parliamentarians were given a gloss over by the media even though the male parliamentarians were in the majority. The GMBS (2003) noted that women account for 19 percent as sources and men account for 81 percent, showing that the Namibian media is more likely to speak to men than women, even on issues affecting women.

2.6.6 Language and communication

A feature of parliamentary life that potentially alienates women from the process is the language used in parliaments, and the often confrontational approach used in the chamber. In some instances, this mock belligerence can become actual or perceived verbal abuse, including demeaning references to women’s concerns or women parliamentarians, sexism and the use of exclusively masculine references in debate. In “*Politics: Women’s Insight*”, IPU (2003) found that language had become an indicator of male bias and behavior, and that this was offensive to many. In an IPU publication (2008) a Namibian female MP recounted how the male parliamentarians would heckle them whenever they spoke so they too learnt to heckle back.

Language can be a significant barrier to the effectiveness of any decision-maker, but especially to women who may be less educated and not as conversant in the colonial languages most often used in such structures.

Language is a critical and important informal environmental structure that must be taken into account when exploring women's political effectiveness within government. Communication theories examining gendered language usage are also relevant to this research study. U.S. Professor of speech communication Julia Wood (1994) characterizes women's speech as communication that works towards fostering connections, support, closeness and understanding. Men's speech revolves around the goals of exerting control, preserving independence, or enhancing one's status (Wood 1994). Organisations or structures (such as government) that, says Wood, have "historically been designed by and for men include language and behaviour that men find familiar and comfortable, but women may not" (Wood 1994). Wood concludes that differing speech patterns can lead to problems in communication and effectiveness. This clearly impacts the ability of women to influence proceedings inside governing structures.

Research in the UK by Lyn Kathlene (1995) has shown the way in which male politicians dominate communication as a means of regaining their sense of entitlement and countering female presence. In the British context, Puwar (1997, 2003) notes the use of male 'din' in the chamber to intimidate female MPs.

A research published by the American Political Science Review (2012), an academic journal specializing in political science, found that, "Women who are outnumbered by men in a group are less likely to speak their minds. In fact new research has found that women speak 75% less than men when in such a setting". The research noted that when voting by majority decision, women deferred speaking if outnumbered by men in a group. However, when

voting unanimously, the researchers found that women were much more vocal, suggesting that consensus building was empowering for outnumbered women. The researchers also found that groups arrived at different decisions when women participated. These findings, however, are not simply limited to business settings. In school boards, governing boards of organizations and firms, and legislative committees, women are often a minority of members and the group uses majority rule to make its decisions.” These settings will produce a dramatic inequality in women’s floor time and in many other ways. Women are less likely to be viewed and to view themselves as influential in the group and to feel that their ‘voice is heard’.

Morna & Tolmay (2007:144) argue that where women constituted 30 per cent of the participants, they spoke 21 per cent of the time. Where women constituted 30 to 50 per cent of the participations, they spoke 22 per cent of the time (not much different to when they constituted below 30 per cent. However, when women constituted more than half of the participants, they spoke a little less, but almost as much as men. The conclusion that might be drawn from the finding is that the “critical mass” is indeed not 30 per cent but gender parity.

Kiamba (2008) also points out that African women fear to raise their voices and speak out for fear of victimization (supposedly by fellow women but also by men, given the cultural expectations of what a woman should or should not do). Kiamba quotes, Tsitsi Dangarembga who argues that women fear to excel because it makes them seem threatening. Women who want to get married have to present themselves as good marriage material by being meek and submissive.

Sexism often manifested itself through remarks and actions of male MPs. Some male MPs do not believe that female MPs have the same equal rights and their jokes are reflective of their perception of women. Women, to prove themselves, need to be twice as good as men.

Women in parliament are also expected to perform stereotypical roles of women. For example, whenever there is a need for, male MPs ask, “Where are the women on the House Welfare Committee? (The House Welfare Committee takes care of the wellbeing of parliamentarians). However, the male MPs on the same committee do not face this same question.

Male MPs often make comments on the appearance of female MPs. Not only that, some see female MPs as sex symbols rather than as their colleagues. When female MPs discuss women’s concerns, they sometimes face mockery or ridicule from their male counterparts.

Morna (2003:103) in a report about women in parliament, records that the Speaker of the Namibian Parliament acknowledged that whenever gender issues are discussed, there is a tendency among male parliamentarians to joke about them. He further said, “The worst form of resistance is through joking about otherwise serious issues”.

Women always stand out, and are “continuously watched by their male and female colleagues”. This can make them uncomfortable. This male dominant environment also generates institutionalized sexism in the legislature. Tripp (2003) argues that women in politics have had difficulty being taken seriously and have frequently been subjected to humiliating stereotypes and derogatory remarks.

There is political commitment in Namibia to gender equality and an enabling environment and legal framework of principles and rights that affirm gender equality. Stereotyping attitudes and prejudices against women as leaders within patriarchal systems continues to be a specific barrier to participation. Sexual harassment is still used as a deterrent to female participation (Muhato, 2003:19).

Namibia is lucky to have a government that upholds and promotes gender equality in all areas of political, social and economic life. The constitution not only prohibits discrimination based on sex, but is also committed to the advancement of gender issues at the highest levels of government. The president of the Republic of Namibia expressed his commitment to gender equality when he said that ‘the government is committed to the principle of gender integration and the implementation of activities aimed at achieving gender equality’.

However, despite the support of the president and best efforts by gender advocates, there are still negative attitudes toward gender equality, both at community and national level. These attitudes are serious challenges to the implementation of gender policies and programmes, not to mention women’s greater participation in power sharing and decision-making. Many men, having become used to their privileged positions, desire to maintain the status quo (SARDC: 2005).

While women struggle for social, economic and legal equality, many men still maintain outdated patriarchal ideologies that not only form a stumbling block to this equality, but can also hamper women’s greater participation in power-sharing and decision-making. Men used to being in positions of power are not going to readily accede to women sharing control. Such attitudes also impede women’s greater participation in political power-sharing because men with such ideologies are less likely to vote for women candidates (Lebeau & Iiping, 2003).

Others, while acknowledging the legislative gains female MPs have made in various countries, however, report that the mere presence or an increase of women in parliament does not guarantee positive changes for women due to the constraints affecting the extent to which female MPs can have an impact. Their discussions on the constraints center on the male dominant working environment, sexism, and party discipline as well as the lack of experience and diverse interests of female MPs.

Because women are always a minority, if not absent, in parliament, men's norms and interests tend to set the tone of the parliamentary working environment. Therefore, women are expected to behave in ways that suit such norms and the rules created by men.

2.6.7 Women's lack of experience

Many women may lack experience of public debate, opposition or deal-making, stemming from their shallow or skewed political apprenticeship and this may make them ineffective legislators, or legislators who are easy to manipulate.

Denise Walsh (2006) describes how gender differences in debating styles, and the lack of training in preparing women for the formal culture of parliamentary work, create real obstacles to women being taken seriously in the South African legislature.

Two issues arise here that deserve further attention. The first is the question of how women enter politics. What are women's pathways into political office? How and where do women learn the arts and activities of politics? How is political apprenticeship itself gendered? The second relates to the nature of the public sphere institutions in which women do participate, in the wake of waves of governance reform over the course of the last decades. To what extent have democratic reforms provided new opportunities to address issues of gender justice?

Men largely dominate the political arena; largely formulate the rules of the political game; and often define the standards for evaluation.

Furthermore, political life is organized according to male norms and values, and in some cases even male lifestyles. For instance, politics is often based on the idea of ‘winners and losers’, competition and confrontation, rather than on systematic collaboration and consensus, especially across party lines. It may often result in women either rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics. Thus, when women do participate in politics, they tend to do so in small numbers (Karam: 1998).

This research in contrast, is directed at female politicians’ own perceptions of their influence on the political agenda once inside Parliament upon self-reflection. In other words, how do these women view themselves as ‘insiders’ and how do they perceive their political influence? Do they consider themselves successful in achieving their policy priorities and impacting the political agenda?

The issue of female parliamentarians requires going beyond the numbers and the issue of accessibility. It requires assessing the degree to which women have real as opposed to symbolic opportunities to contribute to the work of parliament. Questions such as what happens when women enter parliament and whether they are able to provide effective input to policy development and setting political priorities need to be addressed.

The symbolism, the traditions, the architecture, the provision of facilities, such as toilets and recreational facilities, the use of language indeed the whole ethos of the institutions in Parliament ‘exude maleness’ as one conference delegate put it, (Transforming Parliaments 1998:11).

2.7 Conclusion

It is clear from the literature review that there is very little research that focuses on how female Parliamentarians perceive their political influence to be. Much of the focus has been

on how to increase the numbers and why the numbers matter. What is missing is how the few are supported once inside Parliament. Parliament is a complex working environment that is not very gender sensitive and yet the few women inside are expected to perform and function as their male counterparts. From the reviewed literature, there clearly remains a gap in the literature regarding contemporary explorations of Namibian women's experiences of political efficacy and political influence within Parliament and this is an ideal opportunity to find out how female parliamentarians assess their political influence twenty two years after independence.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores and analyses the different research methods used in conducting this study. The research methods and approaches selected were determined by the objective of this research, which is to investigate how female parliamentarians perceive their political influence.

The research is based within a feminist qualitative research design, and the first section of this research explains the qualitative research design and case study. Secondly, the research population, the sampling procedures followed in selecting the research population are explained. Thirdly, the researcher focuses on research instruments used in the collection of data which include interviews, observation and document analysis. The remaining sections provide a brief description of how data was collected, recorded, analysed as well as considerations of ethical issues.

3.2 Research design

This research has adopted the qualitative research design as the research methods to be used in assessing the perceptions of female parliamentarians once inside parliament. Royce & Bruce (1993) argue that qualitative research design gives the researcher an opportunity to interact with individuals or groups whose experiences the researcher wants to understand.

Considering the lack of research regarding women's experiences within parliament, the research method used is the qualitative method that allowed an open space for

communication through semi-structured interviews. This research sought to explore the opportunities and obstacles that the women perceive as affecting their political influence in the National Assembly.

The research design focused on fostering a relationship of trust and empathy between the research and the research participants. The data was collected by means of interviews, observation and document analysis as well as questionnaires. These were planned and conducted in a way that encouraged research participants feel that they could speak freely. De Vos & Schulze (2002:176) argue that in a qualitative approach, procedures are not formalised. The researcher opted for a qualitative approach to answer the research question which would be a meaningful contribution for policy makers.

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995: 22) argue that research may mean the process in which scientific methods are used to expand knowledge in a given field. Therefore to establish an appropriate methodology for the research study, the researcher needs to take certain variables into consideration for the subject under investigation.

The feminist qualitative research methodology is considered the most appropriate for this study because it provides space for the female parliamentarians to articulate their experiences on their own terms. It is through a qualitative analysis that the women's understanding of their experiences could best be explored. A qualitative analysis places women's interpretations and explanations in the foreground rather than erasing their individualism through quantitative numerical clumps.

The semi-structured interview facilitates a strong rapport and empathy between those involved, allows greater flexibility of coverage, and enables the interview to enter new areas of discussion. According to Smith (1995), it also tends to produce richer data.

Qualitative research employs research methods such as participant observation, archival source analysis, interviews, focus groups and content analysis (Struwig, F.W. & Stead, G.B, 2001: 11). Struwig and Stead further note that semi-structured in-depth interviews are not as easy to measure as questionnaires, but their advantages are that they make it possible to follow the interviewee's thought processes and questions can be explored in greater depth resulting in a picture that is rich with meanings.

In using the qualitative method the researcher will make use of the semi-structured in-depth interview, which has as its main topic women parliamentarians' perception of their political influence as seen through their eyes and experiences.

3.3 Case study

The study opted to use a case study as an appropriate method in qualitative research. A case study has been described as useful to study a process, programme or individual in an in-depth, holistic way that allows a researcher to get a deeper understanding (Merriam, 1998: 19).

As Merriam states, a case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved.

Merriam (1998), Stake (2000) and Creswell (2002) each emphasize a case study as a process of investigation to understand a situation. In order to understand this study, the researcher addresses the following question:

- How do female parliamentarians perceive their political influence

From the above viewpoint the researcher finds Patton's suggestion relevant that a case study is helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of particular people, problems or situations in comprehensive relevant ways (Patton, 1990).

According to Bell (1993), the greatest strength of the case study method is to allow the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify or attempt to identify the various interactive processes at work. In this regard, the case study method helps the researcher to identify such factors and to show how female parliamentarians perceive their political influence to be in the National Assembly. In this light, the researcher uses the argument of HEP (2003:15) that in the case study methods, “the events speak for themselves rather than being interpreted or judged by the researcher”.

The decision to choose the case study as a research method was in order to provide the researcher with an in-depth perspective of people and behaviour within their individual and social contexts (Cantrell, 1993). Since the objective of the study is to investigate female parliamentarians’ perceptions of their political influence in the national assembly, the case study helps the researcher to inform the relevant policy-makers in the National Assembly in which the study is located.

3.4 Research population

Melville & Goddard (1996:29) state that a population is any group that is the subject of research interest or want to study. It further says that it is not practical or possible to study an entire population thus, the researcher can determine the average of a group to consider for the study and to make general findings based on the sample. Sampling is the method used to select a given number of people or things from a population (Mertens, 1998). Researchers endeavour to collect information from a small group or subset of the population in such a way that the knowledge gained is representative of the total population in the context of the study (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

Therefore, the research population for this study consists of about 20 female parliamentarians in the National Assembly, past and present. The study focuses mainly on female

parliamentarians who served in both the fourth and fifth National Assemblies. Thus the study targeted 10 respondents from the national assembly. Through contact with the Parliamentary office in Windhoek, a list of the female Parliamentarians was provided and the researcher then began contacting the various offices to arrange for appointments. Other potential participants included names of previous female Parliamentarians who had served and had left Parliament in the last two or three years. The participants were randomly selected but specific attention was also paid to ensure that women came from the various parties in Parliament with varying backgrounds. Only one male participant was interviewed based on his years of experience in Parliament and his claims of being a leader of a party that advocated gender equality. Due to various circumstances and reasons advanced for being unable to participate in the interviews, the researcher managed to interview eight (8) Parliamentarians. The interviewed participants included female Parliamentarians from both the ruling party and opposition parties as well as former Parliamentarians. As Melville & Goddard (1996) state that it is not practical or possible to study an entire population, therefore the researcher has to determine the average.

3.5 Sampling Procedures

The population of this study were female legislators who have served and are still serving in Namibia's Parliament. Purposive sampling was used in selecting past and present female parliamentarians from the ruling and the opposition parties, who participated in this research.

According to Cantrell (1993) and Mertens (1998), qualitative research usually uses small, information-rich samples selected purposefully to allow the researchers to focus in-depth on issues important to the study.

3.6 Research Instruments

This study used the qualitative research method. The researcher employed multiple instruments and techniques within the qualitative approach of data collection. In the context of the study, the following research instruments were used to collect data such as semi-structured interviews, face-to-face interviews and documentary analysis.

The study used the in-depth individual interviews to collect data and to get a deeper understanding of the individual's perception and experiences. According to Patton, cited by Merriam, argues that we cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. The purpose of interviewing is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective (Merriam, 2001:72).

Observation was used to obtain the richest data which supplemented the interviews. In addition, the researcher collected official documents such as the Namibia Gender Policy, Vision 2030, Parliamentary Standing Rules Procedures, Political Party Manifestos and other related documents. For Lincoln and Guba (1985), document analysis is important because it gives the researcher a general background on the subject that is being studied.

3.6.1 Interviews

The research interview has been identified as a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research relevant information and focused by him/her on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation (Cannel & Kahn, 1968).

For Tuckman (1972) as cited in Cohen & Manion (1994), the interview provides access to the mind of the interviewee and makes it possible to understand the perceptions, opinions and thoughts of the interviewee.

In contrast to the above, Kerlinger (1970) argues that although research purposes govern the questions asked in an interview, essentially their content, sequence and working are entirely in the hands of the interviewer. For Borg (1963) the direct interaction of the interview is the source of both its advantages and disadvantages as a research technique.

One advantage is that it allows the researcher far greater depth of understanding on the one hand, while on the other, it is prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer and the participant. Lansing, Ginsberg & Braaten, 1961, (cited in Cohen & Manion, 1994) agree that there are problems surrounding the use of the interview in research which could result in invalidity and bias. They define it as a systematic or persistent tendency to make errors in the same direction, that is, to overstate or understate the “true value” of an attribute.

In this respect, Cohen & Manion (1994) argue that the sources of bias are the characteristics of the interviewer and the respondent, the substantive content of the questions, more particularly including the attitudes and opinions of the interviewer towards the respondent, and preconceived notions on the part of the interviewer to what the respondent is being asked. The researcher finds the arguments of Cohen & Manion (1994) useful to minimise the amount of bias. Cohen & Manion (1994) argue for interviewing various role players in the context being studied and they suggest that keeping a constant core of questions will give the interview greater validity.

This study used semi-structured interviews which allowed the researcher to collect rich data and to get a deeper understanding of the individual’s perception and experience of the phenomenon.

According to Bell (1993: 94) semi-structured interviews allow the respondents “a considerable degree of latitude”. Even though certain questions were asked, the respondents were given freedom to talk about the topic and give their views in their own time. This is

unlike structured interviews, where the respondents are limited to a range of responses previously developed by the researcher. Therefore, the semi-structured interview serves as an effective tool in allowing the respondents to talk freely. The researcher was then able to probe specific aspects based on information raised in the questionnaires.

3.6.2 Document analysis

For Lincoln and Guba (1985), document analysis is important because it gives the researcher a general background on the subject that is being studied. The researcher collected official documents such as the National Gender policy, the Constitution, Vision 2030, Parliament's Standing Rules and Orders, Political Party Manifestos, newspapers, the Hansard and other related documents. Since official records are vital sources of data, it is necessary to include the documents which also enhance the interviews. The documents were scrutinised and analysed based on the background of the research as indicated in Chapter One. This was done to get a deeper understanding of the policy and helped the researcher to analyse the findings. It also helped the researcher verify what is happening in the National Assembly, regarding the participation and perspective of female parliamentarians.

According to Bell (1993), most educational projects require the analysis of documentary evidence. Therefore, document analysis helped the researcher understand how parliament works and how female parliamentarians perceive their political influence to be.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

This study employed a multi-method approach in collecting data in order to avoid the effects of bias as much as possible in this qualitative study. Merriam argues that "Multiple sources of data or multiple methods confirm the emerging findings" (1998: 204). Using multiple

methods helped the researcher to seek connections in the data collected through different tools and to confirm the emerging categories and themes (Creswell, 2002). One of the advantages of multiple methods is collecting witnesses' account of an event. For Adelman et al (1998), this is at the heart of the intention of the case study researcher, to respond to the multiplicity of perspectives present in a social situation. Due to this, Adelman et al. (1980) as cited in Cohen & Manion, (1994), argue that case studies need to represent fairly these differing and sometimes conflicting viewpoints.

Both primary and secondary data was employed to collect information from the respondents. Informed consent was obtained from the selected respondents before personal interviews were conducted. A personal interview was used as the data-collection method and a face-to-face setting took place between the interviewer and the interviewee. The researcher used semi-structured interviews and some of the responses were recorded on a tape-recorder before being transcribed.

3.8 Data Analysis

Thorne (1997) defines analysis of data as an explicit step in theoretically interpreting data collected by using specific strategies to transform the raw data into a process form of data. For Bogdan & Biklen (1982: 145), "analysis of data involves working with data, organising it, breaking it down, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learnt and deciding what a researcher will tell others".

In qualitative research, data analysis considers an inductive process of organising the data into categories and identifying patterns among the categories. Furthermore, the categories and patterns emerge from the data rather than being imposed on the data prior to data collection

(McMillan & Schumacher, 1993). Therefore, data collection from the interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed. The data was read and examined carefully by using a qualitative thematic approach where the researcher looked for patterns, new information and repeated concerns that the participants raised in relation to their experiences and political influence. Within the context of a qualitative analysis, the researcher attempted to reflect more on the depth and variety of each participant's responses. Through several readings, edits and comparative analysis with the findings of previous research on female politicians, the researcher was able to offer some potential answers to the original research question: how do female Parliamentarians' perceive their political influence.

The researcher also classified the similar responses to merge them into themes and categories. Furthermore, the categories and patterns emerged from the data rather than being imposed on the data, prior to data collection. In other words, after data had been collected the interview records were edited, based on the categories of the various parliamentarians. This helped the researcher to examine the interview transcripts and documentary notes before identifying the patterns and organising the data into categories. Further, this helped the researcher to compare the interview findings with the data collected through document analysis. As Burns & Grove (1997) argue that this provides a researcher with an opportunity to become familiar with the data by "dwelling with the data". The data is presented in a narrative form.

The researcher engaged in thematic analysis by first constructing categories from the in-depth interviews. In analysing the content from the interviews, the transcriptions were read and re-read, looking for similarities and differences in order to flesh out themes and develop categories. These categories are based on patterns and explanations emerging from the interviews.

3.9 Research Ethics

Grinnel and Williams (1990: 304) state that ethics is a discipline dealing with what is good and bad or right or wrong with moral duty and obligations. A researcher has to be mindful of the ethical dilemmas that confront researchers (Cavan, as cited in Cohen & Manion, 1994: 159) describes ethics ,“as a matter of principle the sensitivity to the rights of others. Being ethical limits the choices we can make in the pursuit of truth. Research ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect of human nature leaves one ignorant of human nature”.

Ethical issues advocate respect and protection of the subjects who should be treated autonomously. As such the participants in this research were assured that there would be no harm towards the respondents and that it was voluntary participation. Every effort was undertaken to ensure that the participants voluntarily agreed to take part in the research. They were informed that they were free to decline to take part and could withdraw at any point in the research process. They were made to understand that there would be no negative consequences for them should they wish not to participate. Permission was sought and obtained from them as individuals.

Confidentiality was highly respected at all times. To this end if the researcher came across confidential parliamentary records and or information, she protected them from unauthorised observation. The researcher was committed to objectivity by avoiding prejudice and dishonesty by avoiding data falsification.

The researcher guaranteed all the participants on issues of confidentiality and anonymity. The research participants were assured that the data collected would be kept confidential and would not be shared with anyone (see Appendix B). Neumann (2000) argues that a researcher has a moral obligation to uphold confidentiality of data, which includes keeping information

confidential from others in the field and disguising members' names in the field notes. Pseudonyms were employed to protect the anonymity of the research participants in all transcripts and reports.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter provides a theoretical framework of the research methodology which the researcher considered as an umbrella of the study. The research design, which includes the qualitative research approach and case study method emphasised and guided this study. The research population and sampling procedures and research instruments were presented and described. The research instruments used to collect data such as interviews and documentary analysis were described.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study gathered through interviews, observations and documentary analysis. Since the purpose of this research is to investigate how female parliamentarians perceive their political influence in the National Assembly, the findings relate to the following main research question:

- How do female parliamentarians' perceive their political influence in the Namibian Parliament?

The data collected through interviews emerged into categories which were guided by the above mentioned main research question. This chapter is organised in relation to the categories as follows: a table showing the gender representation in parliament; reason for joining politics, first reaction on entering the parliamentary chambers, the best and worst moments in parliament, agreement with media reports, perception of political influence in parliament, difference made as an individual MP, networking with other female MPs, obstacles faced by female parliamentarians when trying to influence the political agenda, support from political party, role of political party in shaping women's influence in parliament, effect of presence of women in parliament, attention paid by mainstream media to women in parliament, alliances outside of parliament, effectiveness of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, voting along party lines, influence of female MPs in shaping the parliamentary agenda to become gender sensitive, public perception of women in parliament, difference of perspectives and political priorities of women and men in politics, gender

sensitivity of parliament, how traditional rules and practices of parliament affect performance and participation of women and balancing family and political commitments.

Table one: Gender Representation in the National Assembly from 1990 – 2010

First National Assembly: 1990-1994

PARTY	FEMALE	MALE
SWAPO	4	43
DTA	1	20
UDF	0	4
CAN	0	3
NNF	0	1
FCN	0	1
NPF	0	1
TOTAL	5	73

Second National Assembly: 1995-2000

PARTY	FEMALE	MALE
SWAPO	12	47
DTA	2	13
UDF	0	2
DCN	0	1
MAG	0	1
TOTAL	14	64

Third National Assembly: 2000-2005

PARTY	FEMALE	MALE
SWAPO	16	45
COD	3	4
DTA	2	5
UDF	1	1
MAG	0	1
TOTAL	22	56

Fourth National Assembly: 2005-2010

PARTY	FEMALE	MALE
SWAPO	22	39
COD	3	2
DTA	0	4
UDF	1	2
NUDO	0	3
MAG	0	1
RP	0	1
TOTAL	26	52

Fifth National Assembly: 2010-2015

PARTY	FEMALE	MALE
SWAPO	18	42
RDP	1	7
DTA	0	2
UDF	0	2
NUDO	0	2
COD	0	1
APP	0	1
SWANU	0	1
RP	1	0
TOTAL	20	58

Source: Parliament of Namibia: Research and Information Services Division

Table one shows the gender representation in the National Assembly from 1990 – 2010. It shows that since 1990, women within the Namibian Parliament have been operating in a context in which they have held less than thirty per cent of the seats.

The numbers of women in parliament has changed dramatically over the years. In 1990 women held only 6.94 % of seats in parliament and by 2004 this percentage had jumped to 26.4%.

However, the 2009 election for the National Assembly recorded a decline in women's representation when 16 women out of the 72 MPs were elected. Fifteen of the women were on the SWAPO benches and one on the Opposition benches. That is 22% significantly down on the previous National Assembly (NA) and a long way from the SADC Protocol on Gender target of 50% representation.

Three more women were appointed by the President. The opposition party RP had a female MP replace the former president of the party, bringing the number of women in opposition to two and the final tally of women in parliament to 20. It is important to note that Namibia was one of the first countries to sign the SADC Protocol on Gender in August 2008 that talks about achieving the 50/50 gender equality by 2015.

Various reasons can be advanced for the decline in numbers in women's representation in the 2009 elections but one of the key reasons is that fact that Namibia has no legislative quota in place. This coupled with the fact that the majority of the female candidates were listed at the bottom of the party lists.

4.2 Interview findings

The interview results are presented according to the categories identified above.

4.2.1 Reasons for joining politics

The findings indicate that the views of the respondents regarding the question of why they entered politics varied from individual to individual but the most prominent answer from the respondents was that they wanted to serve their country. The political situation before independence was the main factor that led the majority of the women to enter politics as they wanted to break the apartheid system in place at that time. After independence respondents felt as though parliament was the next step that provided them with the best platform to be of service to their country by bringing about change for the newly independent Namibia.

Others responded that going the parliamentary route was the best way for them to deal with issues they felt were not being dealt with adequately by people in power. The respondents

also indicated that through serving their country they felt a great sense of accomplishment and this motivated them to become more politically active.

Another interesting response by some of the interviewed respondents found that people were also motivated to enter politics when being asked to stand by political party members. Some of the respondents belonged to their respective political parties as ordinary members but were encouraged by their fellow members and community to take up much more responsibilities within the party that led to their getting into serious politics. It was found that they were further encouraged to become more active in political parties by members who felt that they could contribute substantially towards politics within the country.

Some respondents gave their reasons for joining politics after being introduced to their current parties. They indicated that they got so motivated and were pained to see how women and children were suffering with no-one to speak on their behalf that they decided there and then that they would leave their jobs and work for the party and community.

“Improving the community where I live” was also mentioned a number of times as a motivating factor for entering politics. Several of the respondents mentioned that they felt as though they would be able to make a substantial difference within their respective communities through being actively involved in politics. These people stated that they were aware of problems that their communities face and through political involvement they felt they could bring these challenges to the forefront of the Namibian parliament where they would be dealt with effectively.

Some of the interviewed respondents also mentioned that they were encouraged by family, friends, school teachers, church leaders and community members who felt that they were suited for a political career.

All the female respondents were in agreement that they had entered politics in order to improve the lives of their communities and that the issue of women and gender equality was one of the motivating factors. The respondents noted that one of the biggest problems faced in the country is the abuse of women and children at the hands of those who are meant to be partners, husbands, and fathers. The respondents believed that politics was a good way to ensure certain laws and regulations are enforced within the country protecting women and children. Also through political involvement respondents felt well equipped to educate their male counterparts as well as the community at large about the issues of gender equality and introducing women's issues to the political agenda.

Surprisingly none of the interviewed respondents indicated that they entered parliament for financial gain. It was all about service to the country. According to Borrington and Stimpson (2006: 200-202) financial rewards is one of the biggest most significant reason for undertaking any form of work. However the findings discredit this claim indicating that the respondents felt as though money was the least important factor for them entering their political careers.

Basically an overwhelming majority of the respondents entered politics because they were politically minded and grew up under the apartheid system, which they hated because of what it did to black people. Fighting in the liberation war was a sacrifice some made in order to liberate the country. When independence was won, parliament was the natural next step.

4.2.2 First reaction on entering the parliamentary chambers

The respondents' views varied though the majority indicated that they were overwhelmed by the few numbers of women in the chambers. Some of the respondents indicated that they felt that this was where they belonged as this was the best place for them to make a difference. These respondents indicated that they had always been outspoken about issues and that their

backgrounds in various organizations such as the trade unions and the youth league had prepared them for the work as parliamentarians. Respondents felt that they had been well groomed and had the support of their party leaders who gave them words of counsel about the chambers. Thus when they went in the parliamentary chambers for the first time they did not feel overwhelmed. As far as they were concerned, once in the chambers they were all equal.

All the respondents indicated that the chambers was very male dominated and realized that there were very few women inside parliament which turned out to be a motivating factor to make a mark as a way of encouraging other women to join.

Findings from the interviews revealed that respondents had felt “a little intimidated” upon entering the chambers and having to speak before “respected politicians”. Some indicated that they were a little worried as they were not as educated as some of the other parliamentarians and did not know what to expect and had no idea about the parliamentary rules and procedures but insisted that they had since learnt to understand how parliament works and what their roles are once inside the chambers.

The female MPs’ reactions correspond to what various authors such as Lovenduski and Karam (2002:125) who suggest that in parliament, women enter a male domain. All of the female respondents felt that parliament was male dominated. This reaction from respondents is validated by the fact that since 1990, women within the Namibian Parliament have been operating in a context in which they have held less than thirty per cent of the seats.

4.2.3 The best and worst moments in parliament

The response to this question varied from individual to individual. Some respondents indicated that their best moment came when they gave their first maiden speeches in parliament that were very well received by the other members in parliament. Their

satisfaction was centred on the fact that no-one interrupted them as they spoke and they felt they had given their all in those few minutes when they outlined the issues they wanted to discuss. Participants indicated that they felt very pleased with themselves when MPs from both the ruling party and the opposition parties congratulated them on a very good speech that focused on 'real issues'.

Some participants indicated that being elected to parliament was an over whelming feeling and they felt elated on being sworn in, stating that they felt that they had made it. The findings revealed that some participants felt that their years of working at grassroots had finally paid off as they were now in a position where they could raise issues that their people were experiencing on a daily basis. Some participants stated that the day they were sworn in was their best moment in parliament as it validated them as MPs who were there to represent the interests of their people.

For some of the respondents, the worst moment came when they were heckled just for standing up to speak and for many the first time was a shock but that reaction also made them develop thick skins and they learnt how to heckle back and to ignore the name calling.

Some respondents indicated that their worst moment was when other female MPs circulated malicious rumours about their private and personal lives that had nothing to do with their capacity to carry out their parliamentary duties and responsibilities.

Some of the respondents indicated that the name calling and heckling from both male and female MPs whenever they stood up to speak made it very difficult for them to contribute effectively as they would be forced to divert from the speeches to try to put a stop to the heckling.

The research findings also revealed that some respondents indicated that their worst moments were when the local media would pick up a story from parliament about their personal and private lives from other MPs and run the stories without confirming the stories with them first.

Some respondents indicated that they believed that female MPs are often picked on more by both the male and female MPs. The respondents noted that men who in their book were known for serious misbehaviour got away with it because they were rarely taunted by the other MPs. The findings suggest that male MPs targeted and taunted female MPs who were known to be divorced or single. Some of the respondents stated that the behaviour of some of the male MPs towards the single and divorced women was as though these women had no right to be present in parliament.

4.2.4 Media reports based on the IPPR research that stated women are not performing in parliament

Surprisingly none of the respondents disputed this assertion. In fact all the respondents were in full agreement with the statement that some female parliamentarians were not speaking out. They asserted that the Hansard did not lie as these were the minutes of the deliberations that took actually place.

The findings indicated that the response from the SWAPO Chief Whip who responded to the media reports was really out of embarrassment as respondents indicated that they knew of and were aware of female MPs who did not make any contributions.

However as much as they agreed with the IPPR research, some of the respondents also pointed out there were reasons why some of the women did not speak and felt that the media should have made an extra effort for proper analysis of why the women were not speaking

out. The study observed that respondents asked why the media reports did not make such a fuss about the men who were also identified as not contributing to the debates in parliament as they were in effect more in the chambers.

Both male and female MPs put it eloquently when they said that women made up the bulk of the backbenchers and normally they would not have much to say because those occupying the front benches were the ones who spoke up on behalf of the party that would have already taken a stance. The role of the backbenchers is to support what the front benchers have to say, whether they agree with them or not.

Another interesting response from the respondents was that nearly all of them pointed out one particular individual backbencher from the ruling party who is well known for her ‘heckling’ of other MPs and not contribution to the debates in the house. A male MP indicated that as far as he was concerned this particular MP was one of those put there not for her skills but was being rewarded for “being a comrade”. He indicated that he could not recall any time when she made any substantive contribution. Another female MP on the same MP laughingly indicated that she thought that the said MP really believed that her job in the chambers was to just heckle the opposition MPs and she too indicated that this MP had never made any substantial contribution to any debates or motions in parliament.

The research findings indicate that those who agreed with the media reports said that there were some women who were basically ‘wheel chaired’ into parliament and insisted that there was no reason why some of these women could not contribute to the debates. Their responses corresponds to a male MP’s assertion that the bulk of those who had been identified as not speaking out came from the ruling party which he believed just brought in some of those women to ‘make up the numbers’.

Although they agreed with the media assertions, the respondents also pointed out the women they believed had made great contributions inside parliament. A male MP stated that the one place where one would find the SWAPO female MPS really vocal was in the small committees. He indicated that in the committees one could get some really good ideas and hear good arguments from the same women who would not speak out in the chambers. He again attributed this to the speaking list arrangement within the party and also that perhaps the women felt intimidated in a bigger setting.

Some of the respondents observed that it was good that the media had reported on the women and named them because they had noted that one of those mentioned had begun making an effort to speak in parliament and that she had actually tabled a motion for the very first time.

A male MP who agreed with the media report on the IPPR research went further by stating that the female MPs from the ruling party really did not have much of a choice. The party would have decided before hand about the position to be taken and none of the members would want to be seen to be going against the party. He indicated that most of the women, especially those appointed by the President did not want to be seen as ‘biting’ the hand that fed them, therefore some of them preferred to keep silent in the chamber.

This description is similar to that described by Hopwood (2005: 47) when he suggests that instead of being accountable to the voters in a direct and transparent manner, MPs are more likely to be accountable to their party. In addition, if they take an independent stance on issues or raise matters brought to their attention through lobbying from the public, they face the possibility of being missed off the party list for the next election. In Namibia where many MPs do not have alternative careers because of limited opportunities during the apartheid era, the prospect of losing an MP’s salary is a serious one (ibid: 47).

4.2.5 Perception of political influence in the parliament

All the respondents gave a positive reaction to this question. The respondents perceived themselves and their colleagues to have strong influence on the political agenda in parliament. They mentioned that there were some challenges they faced but by working together across party lines as women they had managed to influence the line of thought, the decision and the debates. They believed that they had managed to get women's issues such as gender-based violence, gender equality, gender responsive budgeting, child-care issues, HIV and AIDS policies, poverty alleviation, the girl-child, human trafficking and women's relatively poor economic conditions on the agenda and believed that women in parliament were in a much better position than in the last few years.

Some of the respondents pointed out that the Deputy Speaker was a woman and were sure that the day would come that the Namibian National Assembly would have the first female Speaker. Respondents further pointed out the five female ministers and the four deputy ministers as women at the top and saw this as an indication that women had made their mark in the Namibian political arena.

The respondents pointed out the various positive and gender aware and sensitive laws such as the Married Persons Equality Act, Combating of Domestic Violence Act, Combating of Rape Act, Affirmative Action (Employment Act), the Criminal Procedure Amendment Act and others on Education and Land reform that had been passed and credited each other for sticking together to ensure that these were passed even when some male MPs tried to block them.

Some of the respondents stated that the women in the chambers maybe few but they had made a huge impact by speaking out strongly and ensuring that serious important bills and laws such as the Marriage Equality Act were in place. The women also noted that the

Standing Committee on Women and Gender focuses on scrutinising all legislation and policies affecting women and children issues in Namibia.

These sentiments concur with the IPU study of 2008 that found that women parliamentarians are the most ardent promoters and defenders of women and have redefined political priorities to include women's concerns and perspectives.

IPU (2008:68) states that women parliamentarians have proved that, they can assume their role at least as well as men, if not better. They have had to act in united and concerted fashion, giving men pause for thought. They have shown that when they have common interests, they can pave over their ideological differences to fight together and obtain remarkable results.

4.2.6 Difference made as an individual MP

All the respondents indicated that they felt that they had made a difference as individual MPs in parliament and for their constituencies.

What was interesting to note was that the female parliamentarians all gave specific examples of what they believed they had done as individual MPs inside the chambers.

Some of the respondents proudly spoke of the motions such as the ones dealing with primary health care, the girl-child and education that they had brought up in Parliament and had been passed, pointing out that the reason their motions were always well received was because they were based on the issues that ordinary men and women were experiencing and they somehow resonated with the other MPs from all the different parties. The study also observed that some of female respondents felt that they did their 'homework' diligently whenever they had to speak in the chambers.

Some of the participant cited how they had taken it upon themselves to educate the women in their community about their rights and what laws existed to protect them. The study found that every so often some of the participants go back to their community to update them on what they were doing and they in turn felt free to go to them with issues they wanted government to look into.

Some of the respondents stated that if they in any way inspired even one girl or woman to join politics they would be glad to be recognised as such because this country needs more women in politics as women are known to be better leaders.

4.2.7 Working with female MPs from other parties

All the respondents indicated that they had worked with the women from other parties especially on issues to do with gender equality, women and children issues. The research findings observed that it was a matter of knowing how to network with the others. Respondents explained that they knew the key female players in parliament and would approach them first and explain their ideas in order to garner their support. The study further found that it was important to be well versed in issues that an MP needed support on.

The findings suggest that most of the women in parliament got on fairly well and when there was a need to support motions that had a strong focus on gender and women, they would support each other. Some of the respondents did indicate that it was not always plain sailing as sometimes loyalty to their various parties got in the way because if a stand was taken, they had to abide by that which sometimes meant not openly supporting women from the other parties.

Some of the respondents quashed the notion that all the women got along very well when they stated that it was not easy for the women in opposition to be accepted by the women

from the ruling party. The study observed that since they all knew each other from “back in the days” during the liberation struggle and some had left the ruling party to join opposition parties, they were treated with suspicion and caution. Respondents felt that this was rather sad because when it came to gender and women’s issues, most did not believe that they were different and therefore expected all women regardless of their background to work together.

Some respondents indicated that the women in parliament worked well together but pointed out that sometimes it was difficult for the women from the ruling party to work with the opposition because of party politics. They stated that the party ideologies, rules and culture affect women in the various parties. Political priorities of the party are set and determined by the party to which they are attached, so even if they agreed with what another female MP from another party was advocating for, they could not take an independent stance if their party determined that they would not support another party on specific issues.

4.2.8 Obstacles female MPs face when trying to influence the political agenda and attribution to sex

Responses varied but it came across that they all agreed that some of the obstacle they faced could be attributed to the fact that they were female. One such obstacle that was pointed out related to the behaviour and attitudes of the male MPs. Respondents spoke of sexist attitudes and highlighted the conservative attitudes of the male MPs and constituents, many of whom saw only limited public roles for women.

The findings suggested that some male MPs made comments that were considered rather degrading or as an affront to female MPs. Some of the respondents concluded that the comments made against the female MPs merely showed them that some of the male MPs disliked strong women who stood up to them as they assessed what these comments had to do with their being in parliament and speaking up.

The findings revealed that one of the identified obstacles was the lack of research and administrative support from various quarters such as the parliamentary offices and their parties.

Respondents indicated that the issue started with them as individuals who came in with no research skills and sometimes poor educational background and found themselves in a situation where they basically had to be their own researcher, their own secretary, their own report writer etc. Coupled with the lack of English speaking and writing skills including poor ICT knowledge, they faced enormous difficulties in getting their views heard and supported in parliament.

Some of the respondents indicated that on a number of occasions those female MPs who had better knowledge of using the computer for research had to lend a helping hand to other female MPs who did not even know how to use the computer and set up e-mail accounts. The findings suggested that the lack of skills worked against women when they could not articulate issues because of lack of preparedness due to their lack of research skills and sometimes poor educational background. Some of the respondents gave specific examples of how they had to make sacrifices and go to bed very late at night as they had to research on their own. Some of the respondents indicated that they gave up on the parliamentary staff as they were always too busy with other MPs and felt that they were too few to assist all the MPs. Despite having their own offices and the basic equipment such as the phone and a computer, respondents felt that there was need for a better administrative back up system in place.

In relation to a poor educational background, nearly all the respondents indicated that there was a huge difference between the 'educated' women and those who were not at that level. This came across during debates because those who were educated knew what they were

talking about, debated the issues with confidence and were able to convince the rest of the parliamentarians.

Poor networking skills was also an obstacle some of the women faced as they did not have the knowhow and technical support from those who were specialised in some of the issues that they dealt with. Respondents noted that because of the poor networking skills amongst some female MPs, they often lost out on opportunities to stand united. Respondents explained that male MPs were smart in that they made and took important decisions outside of the chambers, in places which did not include women.

Some of the respondents indicated that there was a lack of reading skills amongst the parliamentarians. The findings revealed that some of the parliamentarians did not bother to read and it infuriated those MPs who had made the effort to read each time they got to the chambers to find that despite being given documents on time and having issues explained, some of the MPs did not bother to read through documents and reports in order to prepare for debate and would plead ignorance. The respondents pointed out that it was worse with the women because this lack of preparedness meant they just let the men take over the discussions as they opted to keep quiet.

Respondents noted that poor debating and oratory skills were some of the other obstacles that some female MPs faced. The debates often tended to be confrontational and some women shied away from this and preferred to keep quiet. Those that persisted and were seen to be strong were heckled by male MPs and this negatively affected some women.

Some of the respondents stated that there were some women who lacked the confidence required to adequately make their voices heard and be taken seriously in the political arena. The study observed that it was important to have confidence building sessions amongst

female parliamentarians as this would allow female parliamentarians the ability to voice their concerns about even the most controversial issues.

Some of the respondents stated that some female MPs themselves were afraid to voice their opinion because they feared facing retaliation from their colleagues and the general public. The respondents further stated that there were some issues that are highly sensitive and often misunderstood, so some female MPs feel the need to avoid fights and ridicule. Respondents attributed this to a lack of confidence which in turn affected women's participation to properly debate issues and ultimately in their ability to change perceptions and opinions about various sensitive subject matters.

4.2.9 Support from political parties – how much and what kind of support

Some of the respondents without mincing any words said that political parties use women especially around membership drives towards election. A number of respondents indicated that after the elections the women will be lucky to get any senior appointments within the rank and files of the party because those at the top are always men and that this was the case for both the ruling party and the opposition parties.

There is limited support and encouragement from parties. Women may make up the majority of supporters within political parties but are grossly under-represented in party decision-making structures. Respondents indicated that the men at the top see women running errands on their behalf and to get them (men) into office and sadly women do this in the hope that maybe something will be given to them in the end.

Political parties maintain firm control over the selection of candidates to contest elections, and are therefore the gatekeepers to parliament. The findings indicated that no party will

present an unknown candidate to voters, someone who has not proven themselves in their constituency as a dynamic politician and often women fall into the unknown category.

Political parties determine the ranking order of candidates on the electoral ballots therefore where candidates are positioned on the party lists is a key factor to gaining access to parliament. An obstacle for women is the strong competition between many candidates in one party. It is difficult to get a high place on the national party list. Women face not only the stiff competition but also face bias such as clichés, stereotypes, cultural and religious ones that stress that women are not suited for political life and that politics is a man's job.

The decision making bodies of political parties are influential, but these are bodies in which women have traditionally been, and still are, under-represented. In some political parties, women's sections or departments have been created to give women a voice and unite them within the party (IPU: 2008:53).

4.2.10 Role of political parties in shaping women's influence in parliament

SWAPO is the political party that has held the majority of the seats within the Namibian Parliament since 1989. All the respondents credited the important role played by the SWAPO Party in advocating and pushing for the gender equality notion and in structuring change when SWAPO came into power.

The study revealed that in actual fact everyone in parliament was bound by the SWAPO policies and they know the SWAPO policies more because these are the ones that are being implemented. As the IPPR research shows that majority of the women who did not speak out were from the SWAPO backbenches. Given the responses, it is clear that the ruling party in particular is very influential.

Respondents from the opposition parties stated that they believed that the female opposition party MPs had much more freedom to speak than those in the ruling party, significantly pointing out that the women cannot just speak out without the say so of the party leaders.

Respondents pointed out that it is at party level where it is decided who goes on the speaking list, what position has been taken and in effect the political parties have a big influence in shaping women's political participation.

It was interesting to hear from both the ruling party members and opposition members have a go at each other on how they saw the role of their parties. However there seemed to be a lot of agreement that the political parties can act as an aid for women's political agency. This power acts as enabling women to be more influential on shaping the policy agenda as producing barriers to their political effectiveness, depending on party attitudes.

Women politicians may improve the electoral appeal of parties and their participation may improve the standards of behaviour in parliament. Thirdly and symbolically, women parliamentarians serve as role models for women outside parliament and can assist in improving their status in the community as well as demonstrating the different options available to women.

According to the study by IDEA as reported in The Namibian newspaper, 2012, political parties' policy documents contained few details and largely generalised promises about promoting gender equality. It stated, "Political party elitism and the male dominance makes it difficult for women to enter into politics as knowledge gets divided".

The analysis also reads that "Information within political parties seems to be confined and controlled by the top leaders who are mostly male. It seems political parties only use women for votes and organisations as well as attending rallies". The analysis further states that

patriarchal attitudes restrict women's access to political party structures and prevents change, especially regarding women's political leadership.

4.2.11 Positive or significant changes brought about by the presence of women in parliament

All the respondents agreed that women bring their own experience and style to parliament and have over the years reduced the aggressive nature of parliamentary debate. A respondent indicated that both men and women are more courteous towards each other stating that, because of the presence of women in parliament, the aggressive tone and confrontational way of behaviour by the male MPs has decreased with some men making a deliberate effort to really speak and act with respect towards women in the chambers.

Respondents stated that women being women will always raise issues that highlight the social impact of policies that may otherwise pass unnoticed. The participants noted that because of women being in parliament, issues regarding teenage pregnancies, alcohol abuse, gender-based violence, child-care, amongst others have been put on the house agenda. As stated by some respondents, women parliamentarians share the concerns of women in the community and can accordingly voice these in parliament that men otherwise would not.

Some of the MPs said that women parliamentarians serve as role models for women outside Parliament and can assist in improving their status in the community as well as demonstrating the different options available to women. The respondents cited themselves as examples for their communities where they believed that the girls and young women see that they can do something bigger with their lives and not just end up being pregnant, unemployed and relying on men for survival. Nearly all the female respondents further indicated that ordinary women

found it easier to speak to the female parliamentarians and raise their concerns and issues through them.

The IPU research (2008:32) points out that several studies have highlighted that women are more acutely aware than men of the needs of other people and thus more likely to take into account in their work the needs of other people and thus more likely to take into account the needs and rights of women, children, the elderly, the disabled, minorities and disadvantaged. Women are also more likely to advocate measures in the areas of health and reproduction, childcare, education, welfare and the environment, and are generally less militaristic and more supportive of non-violence and peace.

While women are not a homogenous group, there is evidence that female parliamentarians have certain shared interests and concerns. Men too, believe that women bring different interests and priorities to politics (IPU: 2008:40)

4.2.12 Attention from mainstream media towards women in parliament

It was very clear from the various discussions with respondents that they all read the newspapers to keep up with what was going on but as one respondent said to “also see if any mention was made about them”.

There was a general agreement that the mainstream media did not really cover the female parliamentarians unless there was something sensational going on or they could twist the story to make it more exciting. Some of the respondents cited the example of the opening of Parliament where the media’s focus is to see the best dressed Parliamentarian. Respondents pointed out that there would be no other mention of parliament or the parliamentarians unless something sensational happened. Another example cited by some of the respondents was the

debate around condom distribution in parliament led by a female opposition MP. The debate had the media coming up with all kinds of sensational headlines when the whole idea behind it was very serious looking at the issue of HIV and AIDS amongst prisoners.

The respondents also agreed on the fact that the women in parliament who received a lot of attention were the ministers especially the Finance Minister and the SWAPO Party Secretary General. The other MPs especially the backbenchers were barely noticed by the mainstream media.

Some of the participating MPs indicated that they were uncomfortable being around the media as they did not know how to deal with the media and felt that the media always twisted what people said. It was found that often the media is more willing to report on a scandal relating to a female parliamentarian rather than reporting the important role female parliamentarian's play within the Namibian parliament. This corresponds to research on the media that states media focus more on the personal (Gender links: 2010).

The comments from the respondents does indicate that there is need for collaboration between the media and the parliamentarians where they needed to understand the roles they each play and for the media to understand the importance of the role played by women in parliament.

4.2.13 Alliances outside parliament with other women's NGOs and other CSOs

A number of the respondents indicated that they had some kind of alliance or relationship with organisations outside parliament. Most respondents indicated that they had colleagues in NGOs who they turned to for additional information and support when necessary. However it

was also quite clear though that there seemed to be issues with some of the women's NGOs that some MPs did not seem to like or hold in esteem for various reasons.

Some of the respondents put it down to the personalities involved in some of these organisations. When reminded that the Executive Director of one of the big Women's NGOs in Windhoek had basically accused the female MPs of having gotten too 'comfortable' and had bowed to the dominant patriarchal power structure, behaving like their male counterparts and not doing enough for women, the MPs responded by asking what support the NGO had ever shown for the women in Parliament. Respondents revealed that many of them had taken it upon themselves to approach some of the women's NGOs in a bid to get their expertise and support for specific issues that they wanted to raise in parliament, and indicated that some of them were not really forthcoming but were quick to castigate the MPs in the media.

The organisations that received some positive mention were the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), SADC Parliamentary Forum, some sections of the media, The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Namibia, the Women's Leadership Centre and the Forum for the Future.

This almost luke-warm attitude towards Women's NGOs and other CSO's is supported by the assertions by various research which have pointed out there is need for more cooperation and networking between the various NGOs and CSOs with the female parliamentarians.

Morna (2004: 86) points out previous research which showed that participants in Namibia exhibited the least cordial relationships between women decision-makers and civil society. She states that NGOs in Namibia regrouped around the Women's Manifesto and the Fifty-Fifty campaign especially in the run up to the 1999 elections. But repeated efforts to enlist the support of the Parliamentary Women's Caucus have been thwarted by the inclusion of the human rights of gay and lesbian people in the documents, which SWAPO women are

opposed to. Perhaps the alliances with women's NGOs will improve as the 50/50 campaign takes centre stage again towards the next elections.

4.2.14 Effectiveness of the Women's Parliamentary Caucus

The Women's Parliamentary Caucus was established to bring all the female MPs from across party lines to deal with issues of gender and most of the respondents agreed that the idea behind the set up was a good one but they lamented the lack of implementation of caucus resolutions.

Surprisingly only a few of the respondents had a positive thing to say about the caucus. The rest of the respondents said that the caucus was a waste of time. They indicated that there was too much politicking going on with the focus on who should head the caucus and they had not met in a long time.

Some of the respondents indicated that the Women's caucus still needed to be reworked as there seemed to be some overlap with the Standing Committee on Women and Gender. Respondents stated that the only way this would work was if the women stopped looking at each other through their parties but should rather focus on seeing each other as women who shared the same concerns and experiences as of the women outside of parliament.

The IPPR research (2010) had on its list of non-performing members, the head of the caucus who had been identified as not having contributed to the parliamentary debates and one of the respondents pointed this out during the interview saying that there was no way the caucus could work if the head was not active.

Some of the respondents indicated that the focus was not on the women and gender issues but to ensure that the opposition did not head the caucus, all boiling down to the politics and in the end not much has been accomplished by this body.

Respondents were very critical of the caucus with some harshly saying that the caucus was useless and needed to be disbanded. Their contention was that this body had failed to provide concrete support for the women in parliament and the fact that it really failed to function showed that it was a time wasting venture. Some of the participants stated that the women in caucus were always travelling but they never saw anything worth talking about and believed that those who were in charge did not know much or understand gender equality issues.

The findings suggest that there seemed to be issues about who leads the caucus. The members of the opposition voiced the assertion that the women from the ruling party did not want any one from the opposition leading this body so it all boiled down to who leads not on what the caucus should be doing. The respondents indicated that the caucus was being revamped and expressed the hope that the caucus would be much more effective in 2013 and its membership would be much more inclusive.

4.2.15 Voting along party lines

All the respondents agreed that most times they voted on issues along party lines and there was nothing sinister about this and had nothing to do with being male or female, according to one respondent. The fact remained that they were in parliament because of their parties and each party had a specific stand on issues raised. Their main responsibility was to be supportive to their parties.

Some respondents indicated that in most parties, MPs who were seen to be voting against their parties faced disciplinary measures once outside the chambers. Parties stood on certain principles and ideologies and if the party decided to go one direction the members had to comply. The findings revealed that there would be instances when female MPs would want to support something from a different party because it was positive but because of being tied down to their political party stand, they had been unable to offer any support.

4.2.16 Influence female parliamentarians have in shaping the parliamentary agenda to become more gender-sensitive

All the respondents were in agreement that the women in parliament had a substantial influence in shaping the parliamentary agenda. Various examples were given such as the Marriage Equality Act, the Combating of Rape Act, the Combating of Domestic Violence Act, The Land Reform Act and other Bills that had been passed and the fact that now whenever issues were raised be it the budget or health, the MPs looked at the issues from a gender perspective.

The respondents indicated that whenever they debated around any issue they were mindful that the eventual outcomes of any legislation they advocated for and passed had specific outcomes for both women and men.

4.2.17 How presence of women has brought about positive change in the way the public view women in politics

The responses to this question varied from individual to individual but all seemed to be in agreement that they felt that the public viewed women in politics in a much better light.

Some of the respondents agreed that the Namibian public was still operating under a patriarchal system where they did not believe that a woman's place was in politics. They pointed out that they had to work twice as hard as men and were easily pointed out whenever things went wrong.

The public see most women in parliament and in government as women who have connections with the powers that be and depending on the issue, often view women's presence as negative.

Some of the respondents indicated that they were aware that professional women were not interested in joining politics because they did not see anything positive about the benefits of being a parliamentarian. This perception was also attributed to the media's negative portrayal of women in parliament. Respondents indicated that the fact that the numbers are dwindling in parliament and the fact that there are so few women in high positions seemed to them that the public probably did not view the women in politics positively. However some respondents were adamant that the public knew that women in parliament worked hard and their issues were honest because women spoke from the heart.

The sentiments expressed by some of the participants correspond with what Koep (2009:7) observed when she stated that according to Afrobarometer findings, MPs are those members of government with the lowest recognition and approval ratings. Very few Namibians have had direct contact with their elected representatives. Given the fact that MPs are elected from a party list, their links to particular constituencies are tenuous at best. She further noted that Namibia's parliament is challenged by low levels of popular support and trust, weak institutional capacity and profound subordination of executive dominance.

Aside from this, various local political commentators have made comments on the poor debates that take place in the chambers. Some of the respondents had added in the interview, that the IPPR research did more harm than good for the women as some members of the public now see women in parliament as not doing anything.

4.2.18 Perspectives and positions of women differ significantly from those of men in the NA

All the female respondents agreed that their perspectives and positions differed significantly from those of men. The respondents indicated that for most men it was all about finances,

positions and power whilst the women tended to look at issues from the eyes of the common woman and man.

Some of the respondents indicated that women have produced more people-centred motions because of the way women think. Specific examples were given as HIV and AIDS debates focusing on care givers, land reform looking from a gender perspective as many women worked on the land but were often denied access and ownership once their husbands died. The female MPs indicated that when they raised issues around women and gender, it was more from experience and the close connection they had with what the everyday woman and man was going through.

Another respondent indicated that because of the women, there is now a gender-sensitive budget and both female and male parliamentarians had undergone some training around gender budgeting though more training was still needed.

The female MPs working through the parliamentary outreach programme make an effort where they go out to educate women and men about the laws on gender equality that have been passed.

4.2 19 How gender-sensitive is the Namibian parliament

The women were in agreement that a lot of change had taken place with some male MPs making an effort to understand the issue of gender but were adamant that more needed to be done. Respondents indicated that the tone and language had greatly improved with men making an effort to be gender-sensitive in their deliberations and how they reacted to women. There was a concerted effort by men to address their female colleagues properly. A respondent stated that now everyone is aware that they must use the correct pronouns or they will be corrected by the women. Now everyone says he or she.

Some of the respondents indicated that the women working collectively with progressive male MPs had managed to pass through some serious gender sensitive policies and legislation pointing this out as a measure of their political influence.

In terms of the work place policies such as sexual harassment, maternity leave and so on, a few of the respondents indicated that they had never seen the sexual harassment policy document in parliament and were not aware that it was there.

Some of the respondents do not think that the parliament is gender-sensitive with regards to the way it operates and on the many issues that women need addressed. They justified their response by stating that whenever gender and women's issues are raised there is a tendency to make jokes about these issues and where you find respected men asking 'stupid' questions about women, making one wonder whether they were serious about the issues of gender equality and women.

Some of the respondent stated categorically that the NA was not gender sensitive as yet because they had failed to even look at the issues of child care support and how this affected the single mothers with young children.

The Standing Orders and Rules of the NA that is the instrument that organizes parliamentary life does not contain gender-based discriminatory provisions and is in effect a gender blind document.

4.2.20 How the traditional rules and practices of the Namibian Parliament affect the performance and participation of women

Parliamentary cultures such as heckling, sexist jokes or having their voices and opinions being ignored have left female MPs feeling disrespected and often affecting their performance and participation. Such cultures foster a supportive atmosphere for male

members, but not for women members and this influences how female MPs perceive their political effectiveness.

Some of the respondents indicated how male MPs would call them names and insisting on calling them sell outs or other derogatory names when they were seen to be supporting issues that they did not deem necessary such as support and advocating for the rights of gay and lesbian people. The female respondents indicated that the persist heckling and name calling were meant to intimidate and humiliate them. When asked how they dealt with the name calling and heckling, most of the respondents replied that they learnt to ignore such MPs and would just get on with their deliberations. Respondents claimed that their victory over the male MPs came each time their motions were passed. MPs pointed out that it was the culture of the chambers to call others names and if one did not know how to handle it, it affected their performance. The study observed that female MPs had to be assertive and confident inside the chambers or else they would not survive the name calling and heckling.

Some of the respondents indicated that it was important for all female parliamentarians to be aware of their rights in parliament. Respondents said that it was important for the women to know and understand the Parliament's Standing Rules and Orders that basically state what and how MPS should behave and work in parliament. The female MPs spoke of the unwritten rules where for instance the men expect to speak first.

Morna (2003:103) in a report about women in parliament, records that the Speaker of the Namibian Parliament acknowledged that whenever gender issues are discussed, there is a tendency among male parliamentarians to joke about them and said, "The worst form of resistance is through joking about otherwise serious issues".

Others spoke of the issue of the age gap and the respect aspect. This was especially more for the younger MPs who would go head to head with a much older MP who would eventually

raise the issue of respect and the years of experience he has. However as some of the respondents stated, an MP is an MP and when in parliament you do not see age or experience, you see an opponent. The female MPs added that it was much more difficult for the female MPs from the opposition because they were treated as traitors especially if they had at one time been in the ruling party

Parliaments are work places that have been shaped primarily by men. They remain organisations that follow long-held traditions, including the timetable of sitting days and the times for debates and hearings. Parliamentary cultures often emphasize a club-like atmosphere where work inside the building is to be prioritised over other responsibilities.

The principles of parity and democracy are often thwarted by established rules and practices that were developed in the absence of women (IPU: 2008: 6).

4.2.21 Balancing family and political commitments

Family and friends play a huge role in influencing an individual in making a career decision whether political or otherwise. Support of these individuals is a huge motivating factor when deciding whether to pursue a career. The respondents indicated that a career in politics usually requires long working hours as well as travelling across the country and abroad. Without a good support system and understanding from friends and family respondents agreed that they would have felt immensely discouraged to further pursue this difficult career path.

Some of the respondents indicated that in the beginning it was a nightmare for them trying to balance a young family and their responsibilities as an MP. They spoke of how their children learnt very early on that they had to learn to do things for themselves and their husbands or partners had to learn to do the family shopping and cooking. Nearly all the participants

emphasised that because of a supportive family system in place they were able to balance family and parliamentary duties.

Some of the respondents indicated that it was much more difficult for women to even think of going to the bar in the evening to unwind and talk politics outside the chambers because the first thought most women had was to get home and see how the children were doing. The study observed that men could stay on and strategize over a few beers and this often worked against the women. Respondents pointed out in our society a woman seen in the company of men after hours was sure to raise eye brows and stated that women themselves would be in the forefront of calling her names.

In essence domestic responsibilities are seen as the single most important deterrent. The pressure was more on single parents but most indicated that they had a good support system from family and friends.

Tripp (2001) argues that women themselves are often reluctant to run for public positions and this is partly attributed to cultural prohibitions on women speaking in public or going to public places. Political campaigning requires that one travel extensively, spend nights away from home, go into bars, and for women it means meeting men. All of these things are not easily accepted for women in many African societies. Women who vie for public office have to consider the risk of being labeled 'loose' or 'unfit' as mothers and wives, and being socially stigmatized. Such considerations make many women shy away from politics, and positions that put them in the public eye.

4.3 Conclusion

The primary research objective of this study was to explore the female Parliamentarians' perceptions of their ability to influence the political agenda in Namibia. In this chapter, the female Parliamentarians share their own experiences beginning with the reasons as to why they joined politics and go on to describe how they perceive their performance to be. Several challenges are listed and despite their few numbers inside Parliament, the female MPs believe they have made their mark and by citing some of the gender policies, laws and committees set up, they believe that they have and do influence the Namibian political agenda.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the main findings of the study, which aimed to investigate female parliamentarians' perceptions of their political influence in the Namibian National Assembly. This chapter gives a brief summary of the study and its' outcomes as informed by the problem statement. After the main findings, the conclusions are reached and recommendations given.

5.2 Conclusions

Despite the political commitment to gender equality, women's empowerment and access to the Namibian parliament, not much effort has been put in to assess or monitor what happens when women enter public spaces like parliament and how effective they are once in there. How do female parliamentarians see themselves or understand how able and effective they are once inside parliament.

The primary research objective of this study was to explore women Parliamentarians' perceptions of their ability to influence the political agenda in Namibia. Overall, the female MPs who participated in this study perceive themselves and each other as having a strong influence on the political agenda. Participants discussed issues around gender and representation, both challenges and opportunities and in effect believe that they have asserted their voice in the legislative and national level decision making processes as evidenced by the passing of gender specific bills such as the Marriage Equality Bill, the Combating of Rape Act, the Combating of Domestic Violence Act and the notion that every motion being

debated is done from a gendered perspective. Their positive response coupled with a sense of accomplishment show that the women in parliament have been able to influence the political agenda despite some challenges.

Briefly, one of the obstacles principally concerned the parliamentary rules and practices. The first challenge identified by women was getting to know the rules and mastering the parliamentary procedures. When women come into parliament, they are often unaware of how the institution functions and how to use the rules of parliament to their best advantage. These are the official rules. There are also unwritten rules and practices or areas or spheres that are not necessarily accessible to women, where decisions are taken in an informal way, constituting women's effective input.

Another challenge highlighted was the notion of political party manoeuvres, which women were once again unfamiliar with and need to become acquainted with. The nature of the debates was also highlighted as it tended to be confrontational and sometimes negatively targeting women's capacities.

Another set of obstacles relates to behaviour and attitudes. Women spoke of sexist attitudes and highlighted the conservative attitudes of male parliamentarians, many of whom saw only limited public roles for women. The cultural perceptions of both the men parliamentarians and the population as a whole limit the breadth of opportunities for female parliamentarians.

Another obstacle that limits women's work is the lack of awareness of women's and gender issues on the part of both parliamentarians and the general public. This lack of awareness also limits women's parliamentarians' capacity to push for policies related to women's rights.

Another identified obstacle relates to practical problems which is how to juggle political and family responsibilities. This obstacle remains valid once in parliament – the fact that there are

no childcare support facilities, the financial limitations that women might face, which again do not facilitate their participation in parliament, and the strains on personal life that entry into politics can provoke.

The last obstacle is linked to women's self-confidence. Some women on entering this mainly male dominated domain, have felt challenged, that they did not have enough stamina to continue or that they needed to seek support in order to make their voice heard.

Pushing for policies linked to gender issues can also be challenging. For success to be achieved, men and women highlighted the need to have the ruling party's support as well as the support of all parliamentarians and of civil society groups. The number of women was also identified as a key factor in terms of pushing policies through.

Women feel that if there are not enough of them in parliament, it makes it even harder for them to push for policies linked to gender issues. If there are few women in parliament, it is difficult for them to be on all the committees. They are spread very thin and cannot be everywhere in terms of their capacity to lobby, strategize and push within their different political parties. Thus once again the notion of a critical mass of thirty per cent, which is seen as the mass at which women can have a significant impact, was highlighted as one of the main constraints in terms of women acting in parliament.

Twenty two years after independence this study finds that women in parliament are still under-represented. However despite the under-representation in parliament, the female parliamentarians have made inroads and have made an impact on the politics of the country. As discussed in the literature review, studies have examined the role of female parliamentarians in Namibia and the role of gender and this study needs to be seen as contributing to the development of this conversation.

Based on the challenges identified, the study aimed to seek answers to the main research question, as mentioned in chapter one.

The results showed that overall the female MPs who participated in this study perceive themselves and each other to have strong influence on the political agenda. Parliament remains a place where men dominate overall, especially in the informal social spaces where many political discussions take place. A further conclusion to be made is although there are no legal barriers to women's participation in parliament, significant challenges persist that ultimately affect the performance and participation of women in parliament.

In many ways this study attests to the fact that despite a gender sensitive constitution, a well-defined national gender programme and government commitment to the equal participation of women in politics, gender equality is not yet a reality in parliament a lot more work, has to be done with regards to transforming parliament itself.

Political parties remain the gatekeepers to the advancement of women in politics and as they are important in parliamentary politics, it is at the party level that the principle of equality must be put into practice.

The media still battles to report adequately on the women in parliament and politics by falling short of giving a gender based analysis of the challenges faced by female parliamentarians.

The study found that female parliamentarians do not receive the same amount of support as their male counterparts. In order for a female parliamentarian to improve their influence in the Namibian parliament they require unlimited support from political parties, private institutions, trade unions, judiciary systems, academic institutions and the civil society at large.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the participants perceive that it is the attitudes of political parties towards issues of gender equality that are the principal agents impacting their ability to influence the political agenda.

In conclusion, this chapter has broadly enabled the researcher of this study to have a better understanding in relation to the research area and on that basis realised the need for further investigation on how the participation of women in parliament can be further enhanced considering that the next elections are basically around the corner in 2014. It is not only about participation but further research needs to be conducted around the performance of parliamentarians so as to assess and monitor progress from a gender perspective.

5.3 Recommendations

Given the above mentioned findings and conclusions, the study advances the following recommendations in respect of the following categories:

5.3.1 Political parties

Gender transformation should start within the political parties themselves where women should be encouraged to participate at the highest levels.

It is therefore recommended that political parties should include women of different political persuasions in the drafting of the parties' manifestos and policies and that those policy documents should have clear cut positions on women's participation.

It is also recommended that parliament should set aside some funds to have sustained gender training for the political parties in parliament.

5.3.2 Networking efforts

Support from groups such as political parties, Women's NGOs CSOs, trade unions, the judiciary and others is essential when it comes to the overall success of female parliamentarians. It is therefore recommended that efforts must be taken to make these groups fully aware of the important role they play in ensuring gender equality and fairness within political structures. Perhaps there should be more interactions and exchanges between these organizations and the parliamentarians, both female and male.

5.3.3 Forming partnerships with the media

The media within any country is a very powerful tool in influencing public opinions and shifting unfair stereotypes. The media needs to become more supportive in their coverage and portrayal of female parliamentarians. It is recommended that the parliamentary staff should devise innovative ways of linking the media practitioners such as the Editors and the journalists to have periodic interactions with the parliamentarians.

Another recommendation is that training should be conducted for both the media and parliament at different stages so that there is more professional reporting and awareness created on both sides.

The media has a responsibility to support female candidates by reporting on events that they may carry out and the positive impact these events have for the country. Media campaigns need to be carried out to promote positive images of women in leadership positions.

Journalists need to engage in discussions on gender equality, not only within the Namibian Parliament but across the board. If journalists understand the important role that they play on the perception of female parliamentarians it will lead to increased coverage and ultimately public debates.

It is recommended that the Women's Caucus should help in building relationships between women in politics and the media. Such workshops will empower women with all the skills required for dealing with the media as well as provide the media with all the information they need to be more gender sensitive in their reporting styles.

5.3.4 Support female MPs through training and guidance

Training is a valuable tool required to increase female parliamentarians influence within the Namibian parliament. It is therefore recommended that training initiatives for female parliamentarians needs to become a priority for government. These training campaigns should become available to female parliamentarians the moment they run for parliament. Once the female candidate is elected into parliament these training initiatives need to be intensified.

It is further recommended that female parliamentarians need to be adequately trained in various aspects of politics, especially on how to position themselves for the top positions in the party and parliament.

It is also recommended that training in the use of computers and other technologies be intensified. The world we live in is very high paced and a new type of technology becomes available at an incredibly fast pace and women in parliament cannot afford to be left behind. Therefore training on how to properly use these technologies is important to female parliamentarians' outreach programmes and social networking sites such as twitter and Facebook have become serious tools in reaching a mass audience and letting them know of events, motions and aims of female parliamentarians. Not only in reaching out to a mass audience but it will help keep the parliamentarians updated on the latest issues and trends in parliamentary politics.

Being able to use the computer will also aid female parliamentarians in presenting their work and research findings and storing them adequately for future referrals.

It is also recommended that training should also be focused on building self confidence amongst female parliamentarians. Often female parliamentarians lack the confidence required to adequately make their voices heard and be taken seriously in the political arena. Confidence building amongst female parliamentarians allows gives them the ability to voice their concerns about even the most controversial issues. Confidence building will assist a female parliamentarian to have the confidence to properly debate issues and ultimately in their ability to change perceptions and opinions about various gender sensitive subject matters.

It is recommended that it is time for a serious debate on quotas. The Namibian parliament through the Government has committed to having a gender balance of 50-50 equality. The quotas can be applied as a temporary measure until the barriers for women's entry into politics are removed. The implementation of quotas within the National Assembly of Namibia whether temporary or permanent will show a commitment within the Namibian parliament to increase female representation.

The Namibian government should also strongly explore the possibility of a “double quota” system. The concept of "double quota" is sometimes used to not only require a certain percentage of *women* on the electoral list, but also prevents that the women candidates are just placed on the bottom of the list with little chance to be elected. The ranking order on the electoral list is very important and needs to be regulated to ensure that it gives women a fair opportunity to be elected. "Placement mandates" or rules about the rank order of candidates, especially at the top of the list, must be in place.

Dahlerup (2006: 19-21) states that if the leading party in a country uses a quota this may have a significant impact on the overall rate of female representation as other political parties may follow through with their own quotas for female representation.

The use of quotas is increasingly influenced by international recommendations. It seems important however that quotas are not just imposed from above but rest on grass root mobilization of women and the active participation of women's organizations.

Quotas in themselves do not remove all the other barriers for women's influence within parliament, but under certain conditions electoral gender quotas can lead to historical leaps in women's political representation.

Guidance for female parliamentarians is also of utmost importance and thus the recommendation is that long standing members of parliament need to be accommodating of younger female parliamentarians and provide them with any type of help they require in order to achieve their objectives.

5.3.5 Evaluation and monitoring

Furthermore it is important for the Namibian government to continually review and evaluate the goals of implementation on gender equality in all its institutions, in particular in Parliament. Evaluation and monitoring that takes into account of both successes and failures should take place annually.

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