

# **SWAPO's 50/50 Policy in Namibia's National Assembly (2015-2018): Full of Sound and Fury Signifying Nothing?**

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## **Abstract**

In 2013, Namibia's ruling party, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), amended its constitution to implement the 50/50 gender policy. This policy required equal representation of men and women in all its leadership structures and in its representation in institutions such as the National Assembly. The party had been zigzagging on this policy it had adopted at its 2002 congress. Four years since the implementation of SWAPO's 50/50, an analysis of the impact of this policy in the National Assembly paints a troubling picture. At the level of substance by looking at parliamentary motions tabled, we find that SWAPO's 50/50 policy in the National Assembly – which resulted in increased number of women in the legislature - did not lead to meaningful agenda setting in favour of women political participation. This article reflects critically on the gender policy in the 6<sup>th</sup> parliament's National Assembly, which is the principal law-making and policy-setting arm of parliament with a view to assess whether there have been successes in facilitating women empowerment and participation in a meaningful way.

## **1. Introduction**

There is hardly a discourse of women empowerment that does not make reference to patriarchy. This can be understood for women empowerment discourse is inherently responding to women disempowerment brought about by patriarchy. Patriarchy is defined, in accessible language, by Rawat (2014: 43) as “a social and ideological construct which considers men (who are the patriarchs) as superior to women.” She further adds that “patriarchy imposes masculinity and femininity character stereotypes in society which strengthen the iniquitous power relations between men and women” (Rawat 2014: 43). Walby (1990) sees patriarchy as a system characterised by male authority and domination over women, children and property. Both

Walby (1990) and Rawat (2014) locate patriarchy within six factors seen as the source of exploitation of women. These are: the household, paid employment, the state, male-on-female violence, sexuality and cultural institutions. As will emerge clearly herein, this article is mainly concerned with one factor – the state – although all these factors are interconnected.

What is often ignored in the analysis of the women political participation is the ‘analysis-within’ as opposed to the ‘analysis-without’. ‘Analysis-within’ referees to the analysis of the work and impacts of the success cases – cases in which, for example, there has been progress in facilitating and ensuring women political participation – the post-entryism analysis. In this instance, the question is centered, for example, on the role and impact of the women that have managed to enter mainstream politics. ‘Analysis-without’ is a common analysis that can be regarded as face-value ‘body count’ on the presence and absence of women. This analysis, ‘analysis-without’, concerns numbers and percentages – descriptive representation.

This article is mainly concerned with ‘analysis-within’. It looks at the ‘inside’ cases of women political participation so as to assess the impacts of the successful cases as opposed to merely focusing on proportionality. Furthermore, this article assesses the impact of a gender policy intervention – called 50/50 Gender Policy - by Namibia’s ruling party SWAPO in the 6<sup>th</sup> National Assembly. The analysis is limited to the lower house of Parliament, the National Assembly (charged with the task of principal law-making) and not the National Council (whose task is that of merely reviewing laws from the National Assembly) from 2015 to 2018

## **2. Patriarchy, Democratisation and Women Political Participation – What is the Progress?**

From the above conceptualisation and from the literature on patriarchy, it becomes clear that by disposition, patriarchy contradicts democracy both as a process (procedural democracy that includes elections and primacy of individual choice) and as a value system (democratic values such as human rights, dignity, freedom of association, political rights amongst others). Ballington (2005: 24) buttresses this point fittingly:

An essential tenet of any democratic framework is the principle of human rights, including the granting and exercise of the political rights of both men and women. The development of any political agenda that does not include the perspectives views and experiences of those who will be affected is not credible...decision-making and priority setting continue to be largely in the hands of men. Taking into account gendered perspectives and involving both women

and men in decision-making processes are a *sine qua non* of any democratic framework. Hence democracy, by definition, cannot afford to be gender-blind. It must strive towards equality and representation of women and men in decision-making processes and in the opportunities to achieve both these goals.

Democratic countries are generally governed through processes determined by political systems and political institutions of the state. As Rawat (2014) and Walby (1990) explained, the state is also regarded as one of the locations of patriarchal exploitation. Because of the above – and in its quest to confront patriarchy – the women empowerment discourse seeks to transform the state to particularly change institutional arrangements that inhibit women political participation and are thus undemocratic. As such, it became clear that there would be little regard for a state calling itself democratic yet failing to recognise the rights of women and the efforts to fight against patriarchy in society in general and in the political system in particular. These efforts to transform the state have not been limited to states. The United Nations (UN) has also been instrumental in promoting women empowerment in general and women political participation in particular. Ballington (2005: 24) captures this historic role of the UN as follow:

The equal participation of women and men in public life is one of the cornerstones of the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1979, and in force since 1981... in 1995, the UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing generated renewed pressure for the implementation of the CEDAW provisions: the Beijing Platform for Action identified ‘inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels’ and ‘insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women’ as two areas of significant concern where action was critical for the advancement of women.

In July 2010, the UN established the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, popularly known as UN Women. This entity allowed for focused and harmonised work of the UN system on the subject of women empowerment in general and women political participation in particular. As a result, previous entities dealing with women empowerment and gender equality such as the Division for the Advancement of Women, Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund were all intergrated into this new entity (UN Women, 2018). Although these international policy instruments were widely welcomed and heralded as democratic reforms, the challenges of women political participation remained. Former Executive Director of UN Women, Michelle Bachelet, summarised these challenges at a meeting in Finland on 11 October

2011 as follows:

Today many women cannot participate in politics because they are held back by factors such as violence, poverty, lack of access to quality education and health care, the double burden of paid and unpaid work. And because of these obstacles, we are losing a lot of good women leaders and countries and people are suffering from their absence. This is why it is so important to actively promote women's political participation, including through affirmative measures, as appropriate...I believe that women's participation is fundamental to democracy and essential to the achievement of sustainable development and peace. And there is now data to show that countries with greater gender equality have higher gross national product per capita, that women's leadership in the corporate sector results in improved business performance. And we know that countries with more women in parliament tend to have more equitable laws and social programmes and budgets that benefit women and children and families (Bachelet 2011).

It is important to note, for the purpose of this article, Michelle Bachelet's assertion, as provided above, that 'countries with more women in parliament tend to have more equitable laws and social programmes and budgets that benefit women and children and families'. The extent of the applicability of the above assertion to Namibia will be assessed herein. Further on women political participation, Bachelet (2011) argued that a lot still needed to be done at the international level regarding women political participation:

We still have a long way to go because women make up less than 10 percent of world leaders. There are only 21 female Heads of State and Government out of 193 UN Member States. Globally, less than one in five Members of Parliament is a woman. And the 30 percent critical mass mark for women's representation in parliament has been reached or exceeded in only 28 countries.

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Bachelet's successor, continued to bemoan the state of women political participation. In 2013, she stated the following during a launch of Women Leading Africa Programme in Windhoek, Namibia:

In every country, women are running households. Women are running farms and businesses. Women are running community associations and NGOs. Women are running for political office, and more and more of us are getting elected. But when it comes to making it to the top, whether it is on corporate boards, in public office, or in peace talks, there is an imbalance between women and men. Women are under-represented. The scales of justice are not yet balanced. Things are changing, but the top jobs are still mostly held by men...Since the end of the Cold War, women have represented only four per cent of signatories to peace agreements; less than three per cent of mediators of peace talks; and less than 10

per cent of anyone sitting at the table to negotiate on behalf of a party to the conflict (Mlambo-Ngcuka 2013).

In its 2017/2018 Annual Report, the UN Women detailed its work in advancing women political participation. In the words of its Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women is “supporting women politicians, electoral officials, voters, lawmakers, civil society activists and many others to claim their equal right to lead and be heard” (Mlambo-Ngcuka 2018: 3). She however, emphasised that the challenges remain and called for an end to all forms of gender inequality (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2018). The table below provides facts and figures on leadership and political participation of women in the world as produced by UN Women in July 2017.

<i>Description</i>	<i>Percentage/number</i>	<i>Year</i>
<i>Percentage of national parliamentarians that are women</i>	22.8%	By June 2016
<i>Number of women serving as Head of State and Head of Government</i>	11 Heads of State 12 Heads of Government	As of October 2017
<i>States in which women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarian</i>	38 states	As of June 2016
<i>Percentage of women parliamentarians per region</i>	Nordic Countries 41.7 % Americas 28.1 % Europe (+Nordic) 26.5 % Europe (-Nordic) 25.3 % Sub-Saharan Africa 23.6% Asia 19.4% Arab States 17.4 % The Pacific 17.4 %	As of June 2017
<i>Percentage of government ministers who are women</i>	18.3%	As of January 2017

<i>Number of countries with 50 or more per cent of women in Parliament</i>	2 countries (Rwanda and Bolivia)	As of June 2017
	Source: Data obtained from UN Women (2017)	

What the above data accounts and demonstrates is that at the international level, there have been a number of interventions to bring about women political participation. At the same time, there is a subtle admission, particularly by both Bachelet (2011) and Mlambo-Ngcuka (2013), which the intervention metted out against patriarchy seems not to be yielding the desired results. What is left, for the purposes of analysis and further research, is to understand why these interventions have not yielded the needed results.

At a continental level, in Africa, women empowerment and women political participation generally follows the framework of the UN (Martin 2013). Women political participation in Africa has not recorded much success when compared, for example, to the Nordic countries. It is for this reason that the elections of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President of Liberia in 2005 and Joyce Banda as President of Malawi in 2012 were heralded as historic. To date, post-colonial Africa has only recorded five female Presidents; Liberia's Ruth Perry (1996), Liberia's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (2006), Malawi's Joyce Banda (2012), Central Africa Republic's Catherine Samba-Panza (2014) and Ethiopia's Sahle-Work Zewde (2018). Both Samba-Panza and Perry served as presidents for a short period, serving either as interim president or as head of a transitional government. Banda lost an election leaving only Sirleaf to have served two full constitutional terms of office (Ighobor 2015). Although significant, given the Patriarchal nature of Ethiopian society, Zewde's role is largely ceremonial (Wamsley 2018). It is for similar reasons that Rwanda, with the highest percentage of female parliamentarians, is heralded. It is the only country in Africa with more than 50% female parliamentarians (Ighobor 2015). Apart from following the gender policies and institutional arrangements of the UN, the African Union (AU) has been seized with gender equality and women political participation issue for a while. As Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the former chairperson of the AU Commission, delineates, there has been several initiatives by the AU on this question:

Women make up seventy five per cent of the agricultural workforce. They constitute the bulk of cross-border traders and still provide for the well-being of communities, the workforce and our societies, as well as being custodians of our

culture. The continent has taken many decisions towards the emancipation of women and gender parity. The African Union's gender architecture includes important documents such as Article 4 (L) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, the Fund for African Women, and the African Women's Decade (Dlamini-Zuma 2015: 5).

There have been several practical and institutional steps taken to ensure gender mainstreaming in the affairs of the AU as captured by Martin (2013). In 2002, the Women and Gender Development Directorate (WGDD) was created within the office of the Chairperson of the AU Commission with an objective of capacitating the AU to effectively deal with the gender and women empowerment question. In 2003, the following year, the Africa Women Committee on Peace and Development (AWCPD) was transformed into the African Union Women's Committee (AUWC) to serve as an advisory body to the Chairperson on gender and development. In 2009 and 2010 respectively, the AU approved and adopted the AU Gender policy and Action to crystallise the values, objectives and the implementation by the AU, agencies and member-states. Further, the period between 2010-2020 was declared the Women's Decade in order to provide the roadmap, led by the WGDD, on how the AU and member-states will meet the objectives and aspirations contained in all its policy and institutional instruments relating to women empowerment and gender equality (Martin 2013).

This account – capturing the debate on patriarchy, democracy and women political participation – locates the debate at the global and continental level to assess the progress made to date. It becomes evident that although there is some considerable progress, challenges still remain. There are institutional arrangements, at both the UN and AU, to deal with the question of women empowerment in general and women political participation in particular.

### **3. Women and Political Participation in Post-Independence Namibia**

Before the concretisation of the colonial project during the late 1880s, the present-day territory of Namibia consisted of different nations, organised as independent political units (Wallace & Kinahan 2011). One of the common features in these communities is how power and political participation were organised. All these pre-colonial polities were generally patriarchal societies as was generally the case in many African societies at the time. In these societies, politics was not seen as an arena for women as captured by Shvedova (2005: 44):

In many countries, traditions continue to emphasize women's primary roles as mothers and housewives and to restrict them to those roles. A traditional strong, patriarchal value system favours sexually segregated roles, and 'traditional cultural values' militate against the advancement, progress and participation of women in any political process. Societies all over the world are dominated by an ideology of 'a woman's place'. According to this ideology, women should only play the role of 'working mother', which is generally low-paid and apolitical. In addition, in some countries, men even tell women how to vote.

Pre-colonial Namibia was not any different. The colonial state did not alter the existing patriarchal patterns when it established itself in the territory. Instead, the colonial state, through employment laws and colonial policies, reinforced the existing arrangements (Thomas 2005; Shejavali 2013). The contract labour system and the employment pattern, including the composition of the colonial army and bureaucracy, are cases in point (Soiri 1996; Likuwa 2012; Keulder 2000; Melber 2010; Du Pisani 2000). Although often ignored, probably due to patriarchal hierarchised discourse, women were present and played an important role during the liberation struggle of Namibia. SWAPO had in its ranks and structures the SWAPO Women's Council that played an important role during the liberation struggle (SWAPO 1981). In a 1983 paper prepared for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the SWAPO Women's Council located the place of women in the colonial situation as follows:

Namibia is an under-developing country still under South African colonial rule. Namibian women are part of the oppressed Namibian nation. But under the present occupation regime they suffer three levels of injustice: first, as part of the oppressed nation; second, from the discrimination against them as women (in employment and delivery of services as sanctioned by the colonial state machinery); and thirdly, from oppressive feudal practices which are still endemic in a large section of Namibian men. This is not specific to Namibia alone. The social and economic relations of the colonial and apartheid state system imposed on the Namibian society which was already well on the road to a centralized feudal state only intensified the oppression. Customs and values die hard. Many of the then ingrained feudal values and customs are still prevalent among Namibians. It is against some of these oppressive and exploitative feudal values and customs that the present struggle for liberation is aimed at. Only within a socialist restructuring of society can women be liberated from the different forms of oppression and exploitation. In order to achieve equality in practice, women will have to become active participants in the political, economic and administrative life of the society (SWAPO Women Council 1983: 2-3).

Three things are important for noting and emphasis from the position of the



SWAPO Women's Council as stated above. Firstly, women played an important role in the liberation struggle and occupied an organised position within the liberation struggle. Secondly, women understood that they suffer tripartite oppression and were desirous of ending this oppression. Thirdly, they conceived the new society, in independent Namibia, as one that will end all these forms of oppression and exploitation. In a study looking at gender politics in the liberation struggle, Akawa (2014) corroborately finds that during the liberation struggle women suffered double oppression by the colonial state and also by patriarchy that was also entrenched within the liberation movement, SWAPO. She adds that women thus fought the struggle not only to end colonialism but to also attain gender liberation. She finds that the end result is that the post-independence state failed women for they have been forced back to traditional 'women spaces' in independent Namibia. In similar work, Soiri (1996:108-109) arrived at this conclusion:

The participation of women in the Namibian liberation struggle took many different forms. Women were part of the resistance community from the beginning by supporting the attempts to prevent the colonial take-over of the territory. In the national liberation movement SWAPO women took an active role not only in the supportive functions but also by performing many tasks traditionally reserved for men... in post-independent Namibia the women's situation is characterised by great diversity... although one cannot argue that in post-independent Namibia women are forced "back to the kitchen", there is a lot of disappointment amongst women at their modest participation in the government structures.

As stated in the previous section, democratic practices and ethos stand against the very logic of patriarchy. This basically means that when Namibia decided to follow the democratic path at independence and adopted a democratic constitution, it meant that at the state level, a stance against patriarchy had been adopted and legislated. At the level of policy intent, the post-independence state has been immaculate and is generally credited for the high-level clarity on gender equality. Shejvali (2013) captures the historical strides made in post-independence Namibia using the constitutional provisions in the Namibian constitution such as Articles 10 and 23 that provides for equality before the law and outlawing gender discriminations and the affirmative action for women. She further adds that,

...the Namibian government has repeatedly stated its support for women's rights and representation and has enacted, signed and ratified a plethora of laws, conventions and protocols to this effect. Policies such as the National Gender Policy, the National Gender Plan of Action, and the ratification of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development are all testimony to Namibia's theoretical

commitment to equal and equitable women's representation in leadership and governance, as well as in other social contexts. Practically, however, the country has a long way to go to reach the requirements and deadlines to which it has committed itself in the said legislation (Shejavali 2013: 2).

After independence, President Sam Nujoma established, within his office, a women's desk to deal with women's affairs. While some argued that this was an indication of the seriousness with which President Nujoma intended to deal with women's issues – by locating this desk within his office – there were those who argue that a mere desk did not represent the seriousness gender equality deserved. This desk was later transformed into the Department of Women Affairs (Namiseb2008; Haushona-Kavamba 2013; Soiri 1996). In a 2002 interview with Bauer (2002: 1-2), Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, who served as Director General of the Department of Women Affairs and later first Minister of Women affairs, summarised this history sequentially:

At first, after independence, there was a Women's Desk in the Office of the President and people, especially women, felt that only a desk would not have the capacity and the mandate that women wanted such an office to have... After some time, the Desk was upgraded to a Department but it did not have the status required. For example, the head of the Department was a civil servant with the rank of an undersecretary. In this way, it was very difficult for women's issues to be articulated either in Cabinet or in Parliament... Later the Department was upgraded such that it was headed by a Director General who had a Ministerial rank. That meant there was the possibility to influence policies, since the Director General, having a Ministerial rank, could sit in Cabinet. The Director General was not a full Cabinet member and it was made clear that she was there by invitation only... in 2000 when the President set up the new Cabinet, he also established the Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare. From the time the Ministry was established, one could see a difference.

Following the establishment of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare in 2000, several policy instruments meant to bring about women empowerment in general and women political participations in particular began to gain momentum. At the 2002 Swapo congress, the SWAPO Women's Council also began asking for more women to be included in mainstream politics. It was not only SWAPO that caught the women political participation consciousness and bandwagon. Kaa pama, Blaauw, Zaaruka, & Kaakunga (2007: 38) submit that in the mid-2000s, non-governmental organisations led by Sister Namibia had begun lobbying "political parties, parliamentary committees, line ministries and the media with their manifesto and their '50/50' campaign for gender equality". By

2010, the National Gender Policy, that was first compiled and adopted in 1997, was reviewed, expanded and adopted to run for the period of 10 years, until 2020 (MGECW 2010). On the 17<sup>th</sup> August 2008, Namibia signed the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. This protocol, amongst others, stated as an objective to “set realistic, measurable targets, time frames and indicators for achieving gender equality and equity” (SADC 2008: 6). One of those targets, as stipulated in Article 12(1), states that:

State Parties shall endeavour that, by 2015, at least fifty percent of decision making positions in the public and private sectors are held by women including the use of affirmative action measures as provided for in Article 5 (SADC 2008: 11).

By 2017, although considerable progress had been made in terms of a number of women in politics and decision-making position with the increase from 25% to 47%, Namibia had still not achieved the 50% target it committed to achieve by 2015 (MGECW 2017). The surge in the percentage was due to the SWAPO 50/50 policy, adopted in 2013, and saw a significant number of female parliamentarians entering the National Assembly. It must, however, be noted that at state level, Namibia is still without a similar gender equality quota. The quota system is a SWAPO policy, and its manifestation at the state level is merely on account that SWAPO is presently the majority party in Namibia. SWAPO’s 50/50 policy is discussed in detail in the following section.

#### **4. The Genesis of SWAPO 50/50 Policy**

As stated earlier, in the early 2000s, gender consciousness and the activism for increased women political participation were widespread in Namibia. In 2001, Dianne Hubbard from the Legal Assistance Centre wrote a paper for the Namibia Women’s Manifesto Network, titled ‘50/50: Options for Namibia’ in which she made the following proposals:

The recommended option for regional authorities is: require that all parties and associations participating in the elections must put forward equal numbers of male and female candidates for each regional election in which they take part...The recommended options at the national level are: (1) National Council: Require that each regional council elect one male member and one female member to sit in the National Council (with an exception for unlikely cases where a particular regional council was composed of only men or women). This would be likely to ensure a precise balance of 13 men and 13 women in the National Council...(2) National Assembly: Require that the number of candidates of each sex in the lists put forward by any participating political party or association must be 50/50 men and women. Require further that the names of male and female candidates must

follow a zebra-list pattern (Hubbard 2001: 15-16).

There was, therefore, widespread consciousness for increased women political participation. SWAPO was not any different. Following the national mood manifesting both inside and outside SWAPO, the party resolved, during its 2002 congress, that 50% of leadership position in the party, government, parliament and state-owned enterprises be occupied by women (O'Riordan 2014; Mongudhi 2013). This resolution was, however not implemented. At the 2007 congress, another resolution was taken to implement and operationalise the 2002 resolution. This congress resolved that the party constitution must be amended to pave the way for the implementation of the 2002 congress resolution (Links 2013; Mongudhi 2013). At the 2012 congress, the implementation of the 2007 congress resolution was again not formalised. Instead, the congress resolved to call for an extra-ordinary congress dedicated to the amendment of the constitution for this purpose. The party then amended its constitution, at this 2013 extra-ordinary congress, resulting in widespread implications to the SWAPO political machinery. As a result of this resolution, all SWAPO structures, from sections, branches, districts, region, national (Central Committee and Political Bureau) and the top leadership now needed to comply with the 'Zebra-style' or 50/50 policy. The amendment extended to Members of Parliament through the SWAPO parliamentary list (SWAPO 2013; O'Riordan 2014).

This move was seen as a response to widespread calls and lobbying by women groups for gender equality. As already stated, the language of 50/50 and 'zebra-style' was already proposed to women lobby groups as submitted by Hubbard (2001). Clayton (2014: 2) credits lobby groups for SWAPO's adoption of the 50/50 policy:

In July 2013, after an intense and protracted civil society lobbying effort and international, regional and domestic legal mandates, Swapo formally agreed to include a gender quota within its own party structures – a move that, if enacted, would move the country dramatically toward gender parity in parliamentary representation.

The SWAPO Party's Women's Council, the chief lobbyist for women empowerment inside SWAPO worked in tandem with women groups such as Sister Namibia and Women Action for Development. Furthermore, SWAPO has also disclosed the involvement of the Swedish Socialist Party in actualising and implementing the 50/50. Its functionaries have often cited several regional and international gender equality instruments giving credence to a claim that SWAPO also internalised an external position (IPPR 2014; SWAPO 2013). To adopt such a position is to underestimate the women empowerment discourse within

SWAPO. Accounts from the SWAPO Women Council (1983), Soiri (1996) and Bauer (2002) indicate that the struggle for women empowerment inside SWAPO started during the liberation struggle and continued after independence. There was, indeed, resistance and challenges in recording a major breakthrough such as 50/50 policy over the first two decades after independence. Be that as it may, it does not mean that there was nothing happening inside SWAPO to fight for gender equality. As Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, interviewed by Bauer (2002), has shown, within 10 years women fought for representation from a mere Desk of Women Affairs to a Department of Women Affairs – and then from a Department of Women Affairs to a fully-fledged Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare.

This has not been easy. For example, President Sam Nujoma has been part of the fight of women empowerment, sometimes facing rebellion from his male comrades. Mongudhi (2013) captures Nujoma struggles for women political participation illustratively:

In 2002, the Founding President Sam Nujoma was forced to drop plans to nominate 21 women to the Swapo Central Committee. He was advised that this would be illegal, but those opposed to the move accused him of displaying dictatorial behaviour by trying to push for more women representation in the party leadership. A resolution was passed at the 2002 congress to increase the proportion of women delegates to the party's congress up to 50%. If Nujoma had had his way in nominating the 21 women, it would have left only 36 positions available in the election for the Central Committee. Many party stalwarts, most of them Ministers, feared they would have lost their positions to people who would have been “brought in by wheelchair”, an expression widely used by Swapo members. Having failed to get 50% female representation, Nujoma, responded to lobbying by some in the Women's Council leadership, decided to push for a quota on the Central Committee but once again that did not succeed.

President Nujoma was evidently one of the happiest following the passing of the 50/50 policy at the SWAPO Congress in 2013. At an event held in October 2013 by the Pan African Women Organisation, Nujoma located the women struggle and made the following comments about the SWAPO 50/50 policy:

Women have fully participated in various battle fields against the enemy troops while those who were inside the country not only provided food and shelter but also vital information on the movement and whereabouts of the enemy troops to the combatants of the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), SWAPO's Military Wing. Upon the attainment of our genuine freedom and independence, Namibian women continue to make great contribution in all spheres of human

endeavour. However, their contribution is being hampered by adverse socio-economic conditions which we inherited from the white apartheid regime with the triple exploitation of women. These include the continued economic discrimination and some traditional practices that disregard the contribution of women in our society. Against this background, I commend the SWAPO Party for its decision taken at its recent extraordinary congress held in Swakopmund, to implement a 50/50 gender representation of men and women at all decision-making level, which will see more female comrades occupying positions of responsibility both in the SWAPO Party and the Government structures. Therefore, I appeal to you as leaders of the SWAPO Party Women's Council that no efforts must be spared in ensuring that more women are drawn into the decision-making organs of the Party in order for them to contribute meaningfully towards the eradication of poverty, ignorance and disease (Nujoma 2013: 2-3).

As such, SWAPO's 50/50 policy is a result of a long struggle by women and women groups, inside and outside SWAPO, from the era of the liberation struggle – through the 23 years of independence – to 2013 when it was finally and formally adopted and contained in the SWAPO constitution.

## 5. From Party to State - The Implementation of the 50/50 Policy

In 2014, Namibia held Presidential and National Assembly Elections. As per the proportional representation electoral system, each political party compiles a list of Members of Parliament. However, voters do not vote for individual Members of Parliament. They only vote for a political party. In the same year, the Namibian constitution was also amended to increase the number of seats from 72 to 104 (including Presidential appointees). A total of sixteen political parties contested in the National Assembly election of which only 10 won seats in the National Assembly (Electoral Commission of Namibia 2015). The table below reflects the number of votes received by each political party and the subsequent seats allocated by the Electoral Commission of Namibia (ECN).

<i>Name of Political Party</i>	<i>Number of Votes</i>	<i>Number of seats</i>
<i>All People's Party</i>	20 431	2
<i>Christian Democratic Voice Party</i>	2 606	0
<i>Congress of Democrats</i>	3 404	0
<i>Democratic Party of Namibia</i>	1 131	0
<i>DTA of Namibia</i>	42 933	5
<i>Monitor Action Group</i>	3 073	0
<i>Namibia Economic Freedom Fighters</i>	3 259	0
<i>National Democratic Party of Namibia</i>	1 389	0
<i>National Unity Democratic Organisation</i>	17 942	2

<i>Rally of Democracy and Progress</i>	31 372	3
<i>Republican Party of Namibia</i>	6 099	1
<i>SWANU of Namibia</i>	6 354	1
<i>SWAPO Party of Namibia</i>	715 026	77
<i>United Democratic Front of Namibia</i>	18 945	2
<i>United People's Movement</i>	6 353	1
<i>Workers Revolutionary Party</i>	13 328	2

**Source: Electoral Commission of Namibia (2015)**

Of importance to this table is how SWAPO filled its 77 seats in the National Assembly. In accordance with the 50/50 policy, these seats were filled with the names of SWAPO members from its parliamentary list that was compiled in equal measure between men and women. Given that SWAPO had more than 80% of the parliamentary seats, the party list ended up characterising the National Assembly. The significance of the 50/50 policy cannot be underestimated. The table below contains the list women in the 5<sup>th</sup> National Assembly as compared to the 6<sup>th</sup> National Assembly.

Name of MP in the 5 <sup>th</sup> National Assembly	Political Party	Name of MP in the 6 <sup>th</sup> Parliament	Political Party
<i>Loide Kasingo</i>	SWAPO	Laura McLeod	SWAPO
<i>Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana</i>	SWAPO	Agnes Kafula	SWAPO
<i>Petrina Haingura</i>	SWAPO	Lucia Iipumbu	SWAPO
<i>Doreen Sioka</i>	SWAPO	Priscilla Beukes	SWAPO
<i>Saara Kungongelwa-Amadhila</i>	SWAPO	Lucia Witbooi	SWAPO
<i>Priscilla Benkes</i>	SWAPO	Netumbo Ndaitwah	SWAPO
<i>Lucia Witbooi</i>	SWAPO	Johanna Kandjimi	SWAPO
<i>Angelika Muharukua</i>	SWAPO	Alexia Manombe-Ncube	SWAPO
<i>Rosalia Nghidimwa</i>	SWAPO	Doreen Sioka	SWAPO
<i>Sylvia Makgone</i>	SWAPO	Sophia Shaningwa	SWAPO
<i>Lempy Lucas</i>	SWAPO	Juliet Kavetuna	SWAPO
<i>Juliet Kavetuna</i>	SWAPO	Christine IIHoebes	SWAPO
<i>Evelhne Nawases-Taeyele</i>	SWAPO	Sylvia Makgone	SWAPO
<i>Alexia Manombe-Ncube</i>	SWAPO	Agnes Tjongarero	SWAPO
<i>Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah</i>	SWAPO	Anna Shiweda	SWAPO
<i>Agnes Limbo</i>	RDP	Lidwina Shapwa	SWAPO
		Ndilipo Namupala	SWAPO
		Maureen Hinda-Mbaziira	SWAPO
		Aino Kapewangolo	SWAPO
		Saara-Kuugongelwa-Amadhila	SWAPO
		Bernadette Jagger	SWAPO
		Lucia Nghaamwa	SWAPO
		Kornelia Shilunga	SWAPO
		Anna Hipondoka	SWAPO
		Priscilla Kavita	SWAPO
		Rebecca Ipinge	SWAPO

Sophia Swartz	SWAPO
Itah Kandji-Murangi	SWAPO
Eveline Nawases-Taeyele	SWAPO
Becky Ndjoze-Ojo	SWAPO
Annakletha Sikerete	SWAPO
Faustina Caley	SWAPO
Emilia Amupewa	SWAPO
Marina Kandumbu	SWAPO
Loide Kasingo	SWAPO
Norah Munsu	SWAPO
Ida Hoffman	SWAPO
Selma Fillemon	SWAPO
<i>Paula Kooper</i>	SWAPO
Jennifer van der Heever	DTA
Elma Dienda	DTA
Clara //Gowases	RP

Source: Parliament of the Republic of Namibia (2018)

From the table above, it becomes evidently clear that SWAPO's 50/50 is solely responsible for the increased number of female MPs in the 6<sup>th</sup> National Assembly. The table below is a further illustration, developed from the table above, of the impact of the SWAPO 50/50 on women representation in the National Assembly.

<i>Number of the National Assembly</i>	<i>Number of Female MPS</i>	<i>Female MPs from the Ruling Party</i>	<i>Females MPs from Opposition Parties</i>
<i>5<sup>th</sup> National Assembly</i>	16	15	1
<i>6<sup>th</sup> National Assembly</i>	43	40	3

Source: Parliament of the Republic of Namibia (2018)

## 6. The Impact of the 50/50 Policy in the 6<sup>th</sup> National Assembly

Most contemporary commentaries on SWAPO's 50/50 focus on celebrating the fact that more women have now entered the National Assembly. These analyses begin and end with the numbers – the body count – of women in political structures. The SWAPO's 50/50 policy, in these commentaries, is treated as an end. These sentiments are best captured in this writing by Shejavali (2018: 1):

Namibia performs well on many gender-equality indicators, including gender representation in governance. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2017), Namibia currently ranks 12th globally and fourth on the African continent for the proportion of women in Parliament. Getting to this level of gender



representation required a number of important changes in recent years, most notably the adoption of a 50/50 alternating party list by the majority party, Swapo, which holds 80% of National Assembly's voting seats.

In June 2018, President Hage Geingob received the African Gender Award from the *Gender Is My Agenda Campaign*. The award was specifically given in recognition of Namibia's promotion of women in key decision making structures (Likela, 2018). There seems to be an impression that Namibia, at the level of government, has developed mechanism to promote women political participation hence the more than 40% women representation in the National Assembly. As outlined earlier, the 50/50 quota system is a SWAPO internal mechanism that finds expression in the National Assembly indirectly. If SWAPO is to lose its majority in the National Assembly, the gender dynamics may not be the same. Although the SWAPO 50/50 policy came into force in 2013, the 2015 Regional Councils elections were not impacted by this policy. Shejavali (2015: 2) elucidates this point in that:

During the 27 November 2015 Regional Council elections, 121 councillors were elected across Namibia's 14 regions. Only 16% of these regional councillors for the next five years are women (i.e. 19 out of 121) are women...given that nothing exists in the Regional Councils Act, the Electoral Act, or other relevant legislation to ensure a more equal gender representation at this level of governance, it is largely left to the political parties to ensure their party lists are reflective of Namibian society. For the 27 November 2015 Regional Council elections, only 43 of the 284 constituency candidates across the country were women. That is, 15% of Regional Council candidates were women. And in the three largest parties – Swapo, DTA and RDP – 18% of the 232 candidates fielded from these parties were women. Despite advancing the cause of equal participation of the sexes through a change to the party's constitution that saw women being listed in 50/50 zebra style for the National Assembly election in 2014, only 23 of Swapo's 121 candidates (19%) for the regional council elections were women. Five of these women were guaranteed their seats as constituency councillors as they were standing in the 26 uncontested constituencies in which only Swapo put forward candidates.

It is not clear if those heralding Namibia for SWAPO's internal mechanism have looked at the gender politics at Regional Council level as illustrated above. In 2013, few months after the passing of 50/50 policy in an implementable fashion, John Walenga, a traditional leader and SWAPO politician expressed strong views regarding his party's 50/50 policy and importantly illustrate the gap that at state level there are no clear corresponding instruments to promote women political participation:

A half opened door is the same as a half closed door. A 50% women representation is the same as 50% representation for men. The only difference here is that members do not want to compete in one playing field, a field where everything will become transparent; they have rather chosen to compete on two different playing fields where not all qualities are projected for everyone to see. The party is for everyone and everyone can be a leader, and leaders need qualities and qualities are earned not awarded. Such a policy is only limited to Swapo structures and not to Parliament or Cabinet. If for some reason I am wrong, then the same principle should be extended to the whole public structure, private sector, traditional structures, religious etc. That would mean amending the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia. Until then, no structure of government should be contaminated by such a populace decision (Walenga 2013).

Like Shejvali (2015) who problematises the 2015 Regional Councils elections and how they dwarfed women political participation efforts witnessed in the National Assembly, this article seeks to go beyond the increased number and 'body-count' of women in the National Assembly. Like Walenga (2013) who problematises the fact that at the state level there are no quotas, going beyond the celebratory body counting discourse, this article goes beyond the 40 percent increased presence of women in the National Assembly to assess the impact of this demographic development. To conduct this assessment, the article looks at two areas; agenda setting and agency in the National Assembly from 2015 to 2018.

Although parliamentarians are voted mostly as part of a party list system, as is the case in Namibia, the role of an individual parliamentarian is as vital as the role of the parliament as a collective. Both Ong (1976) and Johnson (2005) argue that the capacity, consistency and content of individual parliamentarian is important in the efficiency and effectiveness of Parliament. The Economic Commission for Africa, in a study looking at the role of Parliament in promoting good governance, takes a similar standpoint:

One of the frequent criticisms of parliamentarians and politicians in general with respect to participation is that they only engage the public during an election campaign, and once elected they lose interest in local concerns. Although this may not always reflect the reality of the way some elected representatives work, but it is a powerful perception among the citizens in most African countries... Thus, effective and efficient public participation in decision making requires the political will on the part of the executive, the parliament and individual MPs to utilize their representational function and the array of tools at their disposal optimally (Economic Commission for Africa 2012: 55).

As will become clear below, it would seem that although female SWAPO parliamentarians went into the National Assembly on account and drive of

women empowerment, they have since lost interest in the gender politics that accounts for their ascendancy. As outlined by the Economic Commission for Africa (2012) above, these parliamentarians similarly failed to utilise their representational function and arrays of tools at their disposal optimally. The following four (4) tables below are developed from the official record of the National Assembly summarising the annual activities of the assembly from 2015 to 2018. Each year a total number of motions table in the National Assembly is provided and distinguished firstly between SWAPO and opposition parties and also between SWAPO female parliamentarians and their counterparts in the opposition. The statistics below are sourced from Parliament of the Republic of Namibia (2018).

**Statistics on motions tabled in the National Assembly in 2015 (Parliament of the Republic of Namibia, 2015).**

	<i>SWAPO</i>	<i>Opposition</i>	<i>SWAPO Female MPs</i>	<i>Opposition Female MPs</i>
<i>Total Number of Motions</i>	6 (Out of 12)	6 (out of 12)	1 (out of 12)	3 (out of 12)
<i>Gender and Women political participation Motions</i>	0 (out of 12)	0 (out of 12)	0 (out of 12)	0 (out of 12)

**Statistics on motions tabled in the National Assembly in 2016 (Parliament of the Republic of Namibia, 2016).**

	<i>SWAPO</i>	<i>Opposition</i>	<i>SWAPO Female MPs</i>	<i>Opposition Female MPs</i>
<i>Total Number of Motions</i>	5 (Out of 19)	14 (out of 19)	1 (out of 19)	2 (out of 19)
<i>Gender and Women political participation Motions</i>	0 (out of 19)	2 (out of 19)	0 (out of 19)	1 (out of 19)

**Statistics on motions tabled in the National Assembly in 2017 (Parliament of the Republic of Namibia, 2017).**

	<i>SWAPO</i>	<i>Opposition</i>	<i>SWAPO Female MPs</i>	<i>Opposition Female MPs</i>
<i>Total Number of Motions</i>	2 (out of 13)	11 (out of 13)	2 (out of 13)	2 (out of 13)
<i>Gender and Women political participation Motions</i>	0 (out of 13)	3 (out of 13)	0 (out of 13)	2 (out of 13)

**Statistics on motions tabled in the National Assembly in 2018 (Parliament of the Republic of Namibia, 2018).**

	<i>SWAPO</i>	<i>Opposition</i>	<i>SWAPO Female MPs</i>	<i>Opposition Female MPs</i>
<i>Total Number of Motions</i>	2 (out of 16)	14 (out of 16)	1 (out of 16)	3 (out of 16)

<i>Gender and Women political participation Motions</i>	0 (out of 16)	0 (out of 16)	0 (out of 16)	0 (out of 16)
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There are several conclusions that one can draw from the tables above. One of the obvious conclusions is that despite the inclusion of more women into the National Assembly, as a result of the SWAPO 50/50 policy, there is little to show in terms of the motions tabled in the National Assembly, outside ministerial submissions and announcements. The statistics paint a scandalous picture that is best explained by the table below amalgamating statistics on the motion tabled in the National Assembly from 2015 to 2018:

<b>Statistical description</b>	<b>Total Number</b>
<i>Number of Motions tabled in the National Assembly from 2015 – 2018</i>	Sixty (60) Motions
<i>Number of Motions related to Gender equality and women political participation tabled in the National Assembly from 2015 – 2018</i>	Five (5) Motions
<i>Number of Motions by female parliamentarians tabled in the National Assembly from 2015 – 2018</i>	Fifteen (15) Motions
<i>Number of Motions tabled by SWAPO female Parliamentarians from 2015 – 2018</i>	Five (5) Motions
<i>Number of Motions tabled by opposition female parliamentarians from 2015 – 2018</i>	Then (10) Motions
<i>Number of motions on gender and women political participation tabled by SWAPO female parliamentarians in the National Assembly from 2015 – 2018</i>	Zero (0) motion
<i>Number of motions on gender and women political participation tabled by opposition female parliamentarians in the National Assembly from 2015 – 2018</i>	Three (3) motions
<b>Source: Parliament of the Republic of Namibia (2018)</b>	

What the table above indicates is that there is a serious contradiction between the much celebrated entrances of women in the National Assembly and the representation of the national women community. Over the past four years, female parliamentarians only tabled 25% of the motions in the National Assembly. Scandalously, of the motions tabled over the past four years, motions related to gender equality and women political participation only accounted for 8%. More scandalously, SWAPO, the party that is lauded, and by implication Namibia, for increasing women political participation particularly in the National Assembly, did not see a need – neither did any of its female parliamentarians – of tabling any motion that relates to gender and women political participation. The opposition parties, despite accounting for less than 20% of the seats in the National

Assembly, scandalously lead in the tabling of motions. The only instances where SWAPO MPs have made a contribution to the subject matter is through the executive branch via ministerial announcements, notifications, statements and submissions by the Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare. The nature of these announcements and submission are a mere description of bureaucratic and government activities and not necessarily in the purview of the legislative branch of the state. Weylandt & Wolf (2018: 10) studied parliamentary questions in the National Assembly, albeit only for 2017, and arrived at similar conclusions:

After the 2014 election, the National Assembly saw an influx of women MPs, mostly due to Swapo's 50-50 gender policy, which meant that the party nominated equivalent numbers of men and women. In 2017, women held 47 of 104 seats of the National Assembly, or 45 percent. Forty-nine percent of SWAPO MPs were women, while the opposition percentage stood at 20 percent. In terms of questions, 38 out of 159 (24%) were asked by women. Only 4 of the 17 questioners – or 23 percent – were women... It turns out that the underrepresentation of women's voices is a result of SWAPO MPs' apparent reluctance to ask questions. The women MPs of opposition parties are fully represented: each woman MP from the opposition asked at least one question in 2017 (for a total of 38, as noted above). As SWAPO MPs do not really engage in the process of asking questions, the low percentage of women questioners mirrors the percentage of women MPs among the opposition. None of SWAPO's 21 women backbenchers asked a question in 2017... Women's issues were underrepresented in the questions asked. Only 3 out of the 159 questions in 2017 focused on women's issues. It is worth noting that written questions are not the only way Parliament debates issues – oral questions and motions, which are not studied here, may have seen a more prominent focus on gender issues. In terms of formal questions, however, gender was a marginal issue.

These findings are disturbing in a country that constantly receives international accolades in gender equality. The findings bring into question the extent to which Namibia is making inroads in containing patriarchy and bringing about a democratic society wherein men and women are provided an equal opportunity both in form and substance. What emerges clearly – also the thesis of this article – is that Indeed, it would seem that women political participation is a mere 'body-count' of female politicians in the ruling party circles who have now secured their salaries, and are not interested in bringing about policy and legislative framework for widespread women political participation. If patriarchy was to be a crime, these female parliamentarians, particularly SWAPO female parliamentarians, are candidates for characterisation for the 'crime' of commission – participating in patriarchal spaces without lifting a finger to fight patriarchy. They are, therefore, as guilty as their male counterparts for they legitimise patriarchy.

## 7. Conclusion

This text began by discussing patriarchy and its incompatibility with the democratic principles. We argued, as other scholars have done, that patriarchy cannot co-exist with democracy. When founders of the Namibian constitution resolved that Namibia will be a constitutional democracy at independence, it meant that anti-democratic tendencies such as patriarchy would no longer have a place in a democratic dispensation. Despite these constitutional democratic provisions adopted at independence, women political participation has been a challenge. The Ministry of Women Affairs was only established after 10 years of persistent demands by women within and outside SWAPO. It is clear that the SWAPO political elites always used gender transformation for the purposes of tokenism and to appeal to an international audience.

In summary, although SWAPO's 50/50 policy was met with loud cheering – both locally and internationally – and led to an increased number of women in the National Assembly, this did not lead to substantive issue-raising and agenda-setting for the national women community. Female parliamentarians, particularly of SWAPO, have performed dismally in raising gender and women political participation issues. It is for this reason those 4 years since its implementation, the same policy directives had not been adopted by the Namibian state which is under the control and stewardship of SWAPO. Therefore, the SWAPO 50/50 policy, although important in the fight against patriarchy and for women political participation, has become vulnerable, at the substance level, to a tale full of sound and fury signifying nothing. A new, renewed activism – similar to the pre-50/50 era – is required to activate those who were demobilised on account of 50/50 given the new evidence and understanding that this policy is a mere means, and not an end in itself. This renewed activism for gender and women political participation must seek to transcend gender entryism (and developmental feminism) to move away from statistical agenda to qualitative agenda setting. Said differently, a new brand of activism is required that will marry quantity with quality. Without this, SWAPO's 50/50 policy will remain a tale full of sound and fury but signifying nothing.

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