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# Real or Illusory Progress?

## Electoral Quotas and Women's Political Participation in Tanzania, Eritrea and Uganda

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*Women's participation in political life is widely regarded as an important dimension of achieving better governance. A striking feature of women's political profile in Sub-Saharan Africa is the high rates of their participation in elected government. This can be explained to a significant degree by the use of quotas as an affirmative action tool. However, numerical gain through quota use may not necessarily lead to transformation in gender relations in the political sphere and modes of governance or in the social or economic sphere and may be counterproductive, stigmatising those women who have gained office through their use.<sup>1</sup> This article draws on field research in Eritrea, Tanzania and Uganda, to argue that a range of supports and mechanisms are required if quotas are to go beyond “optics”.<sup>2</sup>*

### Introduction: The debate about quotas

The goal of greater participation by women in elected politics constitutes an integral part of the international agenda for

women's human rights. Women's movements have identified political participation as critical to women's advancement in all spheres. This focus is reflected in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which states, in Article 7, that states parties are obliged to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in public life. The Beijing Declaration on Women goes further by linking women's political participation to transparency and accountability in government and to sustainable development. In addition, democratic institutions are strengthened and promoted with women's equal participation. Without women's active participation and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goal of equality, peace and development cannot be achieved.

The aspirations of CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and indeed, of women's movements, contrast starkly with the picture of women's participation in parliaments the world over. The global average for women is 15.5%. Arab states have the lowest regional variation at 6.4%, where both upper and lower houses are combined, and 6% for single or lower houses. As Table 1 illustrates the regional differences are quite significant. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the Nordic countries top the polls for rates of women's participation.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1: Percentage of women elected to parliaments by world regions<sup>4</sup>**

	Single house or lower house, %	Upper house or Senate, %	Both houses combined
Nordic countries	39.7	—	39.7
Americas	18.5	18.4	18.4
Europe/OSCE including Nordic	18.3	16.2	17.69
Asia	15.1	14.5	15.1
Europe/OSCE (excluding Nordic)	16.2	16.2	16.2
Sub-Saharan Africa	14.6	13.0	14.5
Pacific	11.1	20.5	12.3
Arab states	6.0	7.5	6.4

One mechanism used to speed up women's participation in political life is gender quotas understood as a "quantitative prescription for the minimum representation of either sex".<sup>5</sup> The persistent under-representation of women in all levels of government and the extent of the barriers that operate against them are such that quotas as a fast-track promise are highly attractive. Their use has, in turn, been championed by the women's movement internationally and nationally. Amongst other strategies prescribed to increase women's representation are reforming electoral systems to adopt proportional representation, multi-member constituencies and party lists and the creation of women's policy machinery such as ministries for women's affairs or administrative units for women's advancement within existing government structures.<sup>6</sup>

As the experience of quota use is growing and deepening, detailed evaluations are now possible. For states recently embarking on democratisation processes, African experiences, in particular, can provide important learning about what can be done in times of change or transition. The use of quotas in Rwanda, for instance, resulted in that country topping the world league for women's rates of participation when after the 2003 elections, women constituted 48% of the lower house and 30% of the upper house. In South Africa the ANC adopted a voluntary quota system (largely as a result of internal pressure from women members and activists) of 30% in the 1994 elections. By the next round of elections in 1999, the party did not have to alter its lists for the national parliament elections by quota-use as women constituted one third of the candidates.<sup>7</sup>

This article will explore the lessons learned for women's participation by focusing on three Sub-Saharan countries where quotas have been used. The first section briefly discusses the use of quotas in general. The second section presents an overview from Africa before moving into the three case studies: Eritrea where a 30% quota applies, Tanzania (20% in national parliamentary elections and 33% in local council elections) and Uganda (30%). The third Section concludes with general comments and conclusions.

## Quotas: An overview

The first and most important element to quota use is that, however applied, they are a temporary measure. The logic here is that once women's participation is numerically improved, the

mechanism will no longer be needed. Here it is interesting to note that in Eritrea, the Tigreyan word *hizue* is used for quotas – a term for the special attention a sick animal needs to nurse it back to health.

Secondly, quotas can be applied in three different ways: through constitutional decree, through legislation (or a combination of both) or through voluntary measures adopted by political parties. All three options have been used to various degrees in different places. Voluntary quotas can also be linked to state funding, thus providing a significant incentive to political parties at election time to boost parity at the polls. They were used by the ANC in South Africa and are the preference within Francophone Africa.<sup>8</sup> The Dutch government offers financial support for strategies which seek to improve women's participation – including quotas. Where quotas are enshrined in the constitution or in legislation, this normally translates into the reservation of a percentage of seats for women who may be either elected or selected through diverse mechanisms. This could include a separate women's list placed before the voters at election time. Both France and Belgium have imposed quotas on parties through legislation. In 1993 India adopted a one third quota for women at village and urban local government level to great effect.<sup>9</sup>

Thirdly the nature of the electoral system whether it is multi-party or single party and whether there are proportional representation (PR) and majoritarian or first past the post systems ought not to impact on the efficacy of quotas. However, as the PR multi-party system is widely acknowledged as being best for women's electoral gains generally one could expect that using quotas in this system might generate the best possible recipe imaginable for increasing women's participation.

However, although their use has grown world wide, the debate about quotas is by no means over. There is little disputation about the fact that quotas work to get an improvement in numbers. There is less clarity about how they should be used and whether there are other ways of achieving the same goals, in a perhaps more sustainable way. The differential outcome of quota use in different political systems and cultural contexts must be noted. The debate about quotas focuses now on their use as one mechanism amongst many that might be needed to change the profile of women and politics. In other words, quota use is increasingly seen as one important but not sufficient mechanism. It is useful here to isolate the arguments ranged in favour and against quota use in order to understand the elements of those debates.

## The arguments for quotas

- Given the actual barriers that exist (structural, cultural, economic), quotas are a just compensation for women's structural exclusion by ensuring that they get their fair share of seats.
- Women are as well qualified as men, in general, but their talents and qualifications are often downplayed and minimized and quota use overcomes that.
- The profundity of the barriers to women's participation (to include prejudice within the party structure and reluctance of male elites to acknowledge women's value) is such that change will not occur naturally or at least with any reasonable speed.
- Using quotas allows women create the critical mass whereby their presence can have a sustained and profound impact on policy in relation to women's issues. In a development context this could include incorporating gender sensitive planning and budgeting to improve women's participation in the labour market and gender impact assessment at all planning stages.
- The increased presence of women in parliament, effected through quotas, can act as a powerful model for other areas of public participation, thus breaking through long-set traditional values at critical periods of intense democratic change. Hence their use can have a hugely positive impact within wider issues of society and governance.<sup>10</sup>

## The arguments against quotas

- Quotas can be considered undemocratic in that they restrict and/or perhaps manipulate the choices facing the electorate. It can be argued that voters should be able to decide who gets elected without any external constraints or controls on that choice.
- Quotas can be seen as against the principle of equality of opportunity because women *qua* women are given preference over men *qua* men.
- The use of quotas may imply that as a woman gets elected, an otherwise qualified candidate might lose out.
- It can be argued that many women do not, themselves, want to attain a seat through a special measure and that women elected through special measures can be undervalued or stigmatized because they have not fought it out with the men.<sup>11</sup>

- The use of quotas can be counterproductive in that they may act not as a platform but as a ceiling for women’s participation – it can be made harder for women to go beyond that reserve number once the quota has been achieved.
- Where quotas are applied in single member constituencies, requiring the creation of additional or extra constituencies, they can be seen to create over-bloated parliaments which in turn can be a financial strain in already-poor countries.<sup>12</sup>
- In an African context particularly, the principle of providing special seats based on difference could feed harmfully into ethnic and regional divisions.<sup>13</sup>
- While quotas may produce a numerical gain, this outcome does not necessarily translate into a qualitative gain for women’s political participation.

Finally, it is worth restating why it matters that women are under-represented in political life. Four distinct consequences to women’s under-representation can be cited. Firstly, women lack role models; secondly, the development of a just and equal society is hindered; thirdly women’s interests remain unfulfilled; and fourthly, democracy is likely to become atrophied by their absence.<sup>14</sup>

## Africa in the global pattern

As we have seen, the African profile for women’s representation in political institutions is impressive – specifically in Sub-Saharan Africa. Once we exclude the Nordic states, six African states have a significantly better record of returning women parliamentarians than those in the Europe/OSCE category. While the average rate for women’s participation (in both chambers) in Sub-Saharan Africa is 14.5% some major variations exist. Topping the record in the continent is Rwanda whose upper house is comprised of 48% women. South Africa comes next at 32.8% (in the lower house), Mozambique is at 30%, the Seychelles at 29.4%, Namibia 26.4%, Uganda 24.7%, Eritrea 22%, the United Republic of Tanzania 21.4% and Burundi 18.4%. South Africa stands out furthermore for the speed with which it increased women’s participation in the post-apartheid era – from 2.4% before democratisation to 32.8% in 2004. At the lowest end of the scale, Niger has one woman in its 83-seat parliament (1.2%), Mauritania has 3 out of 81 seats (3.7%) and Madagascar has 6 out of 160 seats (3.8%).

An important aspect of the African story has been the opportunity for a clean break with past traditions provided in the post-colonial period across the continent, particularly when revolutionary and nationalist movements took on the reins of power or after civil wars. In periods of rupture it is easier to rewrite the rules of the game and apply quotas or other special measures to great effect. Not only are new norms in evolution but the problem of the incumbent, and his resistance to change does not arise.

The pattern of high rates of women’s participation is not, however, exclusively a function of quota use. In the Seychelles, where women are just below 30% in the lower house, no quota system has ever been used.<sup>15</sup> In Senegal, where women’s representation stood at 20% in 2002, the party which returned the greatest number of women did not adopt a quota system, unlike others parties in that election. Mali has also made progress without a quota system.<sup>16</sup> Table 2 illustrates the pattern in Sub-Saharan Africa through a selection from the country profiles based on highest, middle and lowest percentages.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 2: Percentages of women elected to parliament in Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>18</sup>**

	Single or lower house	Upper house or senate
Rwanda	48.8	30.0
South Africa	32.8	31.5
Seychelles	29.4	N/A
Uganda	24.7	N/A
Tanzania	21.4	N/A
Burundi	18.4	18.9
Angola	15.5	N/A
Gambia	13.2	N/A
Swaziland	10.8	30.0
São Tome and Principe	9.1	N/A
Madagascar	3.8	11.1
Mauritania	3.7	N/A

Quotas and their expanded use are an important part of the African story, however. The Rwandan case, where quotas were introduced in the form of reserved seats in the 2003 elections and immediately saw women's political representation at 48.8%, is a good example.

Where gender quotas are used in Africa, they frequently go hand in hand with quota use for other historically disadvantaged groups. In Eritrea the equality code enacted by the liberation movement, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, led to, *inter alia*, a quota policy for women across all elected bodies in the new state. In Uganda and Tanzania the practice of reserving a number of seats for women is linked to a wider goal of mass political participation as a means of, amongst other things, enhancing the legitimacy of national liberation movements.

A further characteristic of the use of gender quotas in Africa is that they have largely emerged in a top down (or state led) manner and are not necessarily related in any causal way to wider factors such as the electoral system (PR multi-party or otherwise) or the nature of the women's movement. Neither is there any clear pattern between, for instance, regime type (authoritarian, semi-authoritarian or democratic), and state ideology (left leaning or not) and the use of quotas. The only pattern is, as we have seen, that quotas are more likely to be used in states which have found themselves with an opportunity to draw up the rules for representation *ab initio*.<sup>19</sup>

Finally the use of gender quotas in Africa has been validated in regional intergovernmental organisations such as the ECA Sixth Economic Commission for Africa and SADC which recommended that by 2005, 30% of seats in its members' legislatures should be held by women.<sup>20</sup> In 2002 the African Union adopted a gender equality rule which set a goal of 50% participation by women in its Commission.<sup>21</sup>

## The case studies: Eritrea, Uganda and Tanzania

This article now turns to the case studies of quota use in Eritrea, Uganda, and Tanzania. The close study gives us some insight into how quota mechanisms are devised, operationalised and what their impact has been. The case studies allow us deepen the debate about the effectiveness of quotas by looking at issues of patronage, the risk of purely symbolic gain and the relationship between quotas as a tool for women and the existence or otherwise of an independent women's movement within civil society.

Any attempt to evaluate the impact of quota use, once we go beyond purely numerical gain, is a challenge. What criteria can we use to measure success? Is it possible to isolate quotas from the complexity of political life where cause and effect are difficult to ascertain at the best of times? As we have seen, quotas are understood to be a means towards more substantive ends. In the short to medium term success might be the promulgation of legislation and policy outcomes to substantially improve women's status or position in society. In the long term, a successful end might be the transformation of societal gender structures so that quotas and special measures will no longer be needed. So we might like to include in our scope legislative changes or proposals targeting women's interest which might emerge after quotas have been applied. We might also expect to see gender emerging as a category of analysis (such as in gender budgeting proposals) in parliamentary and policy debates. Here then we need to be able to say something about the role of quota women in bringing about these changes, directly or indirectly, through their party structures or across party structures. In addition, the use of quotas must be understood through the instrumental interests they serve to a variety of political actors. Political parties may introduce them to keep up with competitors, governments may do so to open up new lines of patronage.<sup>22</sup> It is clear then, that measuring the effectiveness of quotas vis-à-vis the wider goals of gender transformation is not a straightforward task.

While the outcome in each of the three countries has been similar and the use of quotas successful from a numerical point of view, each has developed a model which is particular to its political circumstance and institutional arrangements. Thus particularities of political culture and historical context also mediate. As the state of Eritrea came into being only in 1991, and the use of quotas in 1997, the quota experience is both short lived and recent. Furthermore Eritrea is highly authoritarian and normal politics have been in suspense since 1998 when a state of emergency was declared (and has not been lifted). In contrast, quota use is more consolidated in Uganda and Tanzania where political life is stable and national elections have had several tests of time.

However, patterns and commonalities do also emerge. The next section deals with each case study separately before drawing general conclusions. I first present the situation in relation to quotas and go on to discuss context, implementation and outcomes.

## The case of Eritrea

Eritrea is a single party state<sup>23</sup> with a majoritarian electoral system. Following independence from Ethiopia in 1991 a provisional government, appointed by the President and leader of the resistance movement, Isaias Afworki, gave way to a transitional government in 1997. The declaration of the state of emergency the following year resulted in that transitional government remaining in power and the suspension of the National Assembly. Elections due to be held in 2001 are still pending and the constitution is in suspense. Eritrea's constitution was adopted in 1997, and the use of quotas was enshrined at that point in *The Gazette of Eritrean Laws*.

Affirmative action applies, in principle, in Eritrea's electoral system through a 30% quota for women in national, regional and local elected offices. The absence of national elections has meant that quotas have been applied in local and regional elections only. In the regional council (Zorba) election of 1997, the percentage of women elected across the six councils stood at just slightly over 30%.<sup>24</sup> Lower level elections held subsequently have shown that the quota is still producing high numbers of women taking seats. Quotas have been operationalised through the creation of a process which parallels the mainstream elections at each level. Constituencies are drawn up nationally based on geography and population numbers and, following the 30% quota, an additional number of seats are reserved for women.<sup>25</sup> The election to these quota seats is held the same day and in the same manner as the mainstream elections.

In the national elections this means, for instance, that the reserve seats for women will come from specially created constituencies drawn from the entire national territory. In practice, this will mean that quota-candidates will seek office in constituencies that are larger than mainstream constituencies, will represent larger constituencies and that these constituencies will overlap mainstream constituencies.

The provenance of quotas in Eritrea can be traced back to the ideological foundations and organisational principles of the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front). The mass organisation of women into the revolution was understood to help create a society which would break with traditional social and cultural modes and deliver a popular movement for change. The impact of Eritrean women in the liberation movement (as fighters, as political leaders and in the international solidarity movement) cannot be underestimated. Traditionally, Eritrean women did not have the right to vote in or to be elected to village councils – the

form of local governance. Women had to work through a male relative when dealing with the councils.<sup>26</sup> During the war of independence, women were organised into popular assemblies, on the basis of a quota ranging from 15 to 30%, and supported by a political education programme.<sup>27</sup> The strength of the women in EPLF leadership and the commitment to gender equality is perhaps reflected in the gender balance in the Commission appointed by the President in 1994 to draw up the new constitution. Of the 50 members, 22 were women.

The use of quotas for women can be understood then as a continuity of revolutionary principles and strategies of the socialist liberation war and of creating a new social order. Today, however, patriarchal conditions are still deeply rooted in Eritrean society. For former female combatants, return to civilian life has sometimes meant a return to a society where they are expected to obey their husbands and parents and undertake traditional tasks. For this reason, the number of single women living apart from their families and in urban areas is high<sup>28</sup> and women fighters have found it difficult to re-integrate into Eritrean life.<sup>29</sup> Given the limitations referred to earlier, an assessment on the use of quotas in Eritrea beyond the numerical impact must be modest.

That aside, quota use has produced a direct positive gain in local and regional elections. The field research carried out with high-ranking party women and women in local government (quota beneficiaries and mainstream women), revealed an unequivocally positive appraisal of the use of the mechanisms. There were now women elected to local and regional councils in all districts. The presence of these women in local government opens up the possibility for women's greater participation in many other aspects of public life and affirms their contribution. These women felt they could make a difference in office notwithstanding the traditional Eritrean resistance to equality for women. The use of quotas and other special measures (such as quotas for girls in education) was linked to some change in societal perception of women and their capacities. For instance, given Eritrea's traditional proscribing of women's involvement in aspects of public life, the nomination of female judges in recent years is significant.<sup>30</sup> However, that research also revealed several salient, less positive themes. Firstly, many of those interviewed expressed confusion as to the identity and nature of their electoral constituency, and therefore issues of representation (who they represent and which interests) and accountability (to whom they were accountable) were ambiguous. Secondly, despite their overall evaluation of positively confronting inequality

through their very presence, many of those interviewed did not see their role as quota-beneficiaries as having any necessary link to the aggregation and presentation of women's interests. In the context of the Eritrean state ideology of national unity, which leaves no room for sectoral identities or claims for particular interests, such a view is, perhaps, not surprising and may indeed not be particular to these women.

### **The case of Uganda**

Uganda's gender quota system is based on a 30% quota for national and local elections, enshrined in the 1995 Constitution.<sup>31</sup> Reserve seats by which electoral colleges elect candidates provide for quotas for women. Uganda's political system, based on the National Resistance Movement (NRM) which came to power in 1986, until recently operated a no-party democracy<sup>32</sup> and elections take place in single member constituencies based on a first past the post system. The reserve seats process runs in parallel to this.

Despite the constitutional decree, national elections have produced a result which is just below the quota – in 2003 Ugandan women held 24.7% of the seats in parliament. However, the trend, across all levels of governance, has been for a continuous rise in the number of female representatives and before affirmative action, the number of women in parliament ranged from one to two.<sup>33</sup>

A particularly striking aspect of women's profile in Uganda has been not just the dramatic growth of the women's movement there since the NRM came to power, but also that the movement has managed to maintain autonomy from the NRM. This may be a function of the history of women organising independently in Uganda, dating back to the establishment of the Uganda Council of Women in 1946.<sup>34</sup> The dictatorship of Idi Amin (1971-79) banned all independent organisations and founded the National Council of Women as an arm of the regime. The tradition of an autonomous organisation, re-emerged under the NRM and is reflective of the wider legitimisation of civil society within Uganda's polity. Quota use therefore is embedded in a culture in which women are organised politically and seek policy change to advance their identified interests.

What evaluations can we make from the Ugandan case on the impact of quota use? The literature produces two apparently contradictory evaluations. On the one hand, it has been argued that women's increased numerical profile has had little impact on

the overarching patriarchal political culture in Uganda. Despite their presence, women are still considered intruders. The politics of patronage and the elitism of those women who do make it to political office, further reduce the power of women legislators to make a difference.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, however, there is an increased awareness among women in politics (whether quota or mainstream women) about the idea of women's political interests.

A second less negative view acknowledges difficulties and limitations but concludes that, to a great extent, quota use has been successful in both bringing women into politics and in representing women's needs there. While the number of gender-responsive policies has not matched the numerical growth of women's participation, there has been an improved legitimisation of women's rights in legislation. The new Constitution is considered a watershed in this regard – here women legislators allied themselves with progressive male legislators to influence opinion.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, changes in the Land Act of 1988 and the Universal Primary Education Programme of 1997 have meant very significant improvements for women and female children. Violence against women has been addressed in the Parliament. Gender planning has been incorporated into planning requirements at national policy level. A number of women's organisations have targeted electoral politics in their activities and the links between women parliamentarians who benefited from the quotas is markedly closer than that of non-quota women parliamentarians. The latter do not believe that it is their task to represent women and such a relationship is therefore not deemed necessary.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the numerical profile has had a transformative effect over time on other spheres both public and private and in the words of one Ugandan commentator, it has become difficult to present a case against women's involvement in any sector or activity.<sup>38</sup>

One challenge that the Ugandan case throws up relates to accountability. Women who benefit from the quota system come to power through male dominated electoral colleges. Constitutionally, they are deemed responsible to their districts. So although they have gained seats because of the need to create a gender balance their constituency is not made up of women's interests nor of women. Therefore, it is not clear to whom they give feedback nor who they consult in their work: the colleges, the entire district or the women of their district.<sup>39</sup> In other words, the construction of quota seats is not presumed on the

development of strategic gender interests but rather is an entirely practical mechanism to solve a challenge: how to increase women's profile. This contradiction has been characterised as representing a "hollow shelled victory".<sup>40</sup>

Women who have come to power through quotas also find the way that their constituencies are drawn up means they have a bigger geographical area to represent and are sometimes seen as a threat by the mainstream candidates with whom they share some geographical constituency space.<sup>41</sup> This finding speaks of a core difficulty when a quota system is added to an electoral process.

A final difficulty confronted by quota MPs in Uganda is a public perception that they are in power because of a favour bestowed by the NRM, or to be more precise, by President Museveni. This perception has been internalised by quota beneficiaries themselves. The majority of district women in particular feel that their loyalty is pledged not to women nor to their constituents, but to the President. Related to all of these points is the role of the media in representing those women who come to power and the challenge to overcome negative media representation of women's work<sup>42</sup> and the attendant portrayal of women parliamentarians as an aberration, thus perpetuating a gendered public/private divide.<sup>43</sup>

### **The case of Tanzania**

Tanzania's political system is still undergoing transition from a single party to a multi-party state. In May 1992, a constitutional amendment provided for a multi-party system to replace that which had been entirely dominated by the party of the liberation movement, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM).<sup>44</sup> However, although there are now over a dozen political parties in Tanzania, the CCM continues to dominate and draws on its historical structures, deeply embedded in civil society, to hold on to its power.

Tanzania currently operates a system of quotas through reserve seats, enshrined in law, at 20% in the national parliament and 33% in local councils. The political parties apply the quotas internally, following the electoral result, proportionate to the number of seats gained. However, parties apply the quota in different ways according to a system loosely based on a complex medley of electoral colleges and a formula of proportionality. All reserve seats candidates must go through the party system and unlike in Eritrea and Uganda the quota recipients therefore are not elected by universal franchise.

Given its dominance in the ballot boxes, all women currently in the national parliament are from the CCM. This dominance is repeated at local elections where, for instance, in the 2000 local government elections the CCM held 863 seats of the total of 926 reserve seats. At national elections, Tanzania has in fact exceeded its quota of 20% as the current number of women, 63, in the 295 seat assembly amounts to 21.4% of the total. However, 12 of those women were elected through the mainstream process and hence the quota system itself has not yet produced its targeted outcome.

The roots of the quota system, like in Uganda and Eritrea, are found in mass movement politics. The CCM reserved seats at party and parliament level to bring in voices of sectors, such as youth, women, the army and workers and ensure wide political participation. The quota philosophy is based, not on an attempt to structurally redress an imbalance, but to maintain national support for the post-colonial movement across the major sectors of society.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the quota-beneficiaries are known as national members of parliament (MPs) whose constituency is understood to be national rather than sectoral, notwithstanding the fact that this constituency is not clearly defined<sup>46</sup> and in fact exists only notionally.

What evaluations can we make of the effectiveness of quotas in advancing the cause of women in Tanzania? Although the target of 20% for the national parliament is still distant, quota use has increased women's presence there. Despite the low numbers, those women in office have been successful in addressing a number of key women's concerns: land reform, enrolment practices for third level education and a sexual offences bill.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore issues have been pushed upwards from the polity by women's NGOs<sup>48</sup> providing a route that might not have previously been so open.

However, the transformative impact of the quota system has been negligible if not entirely absent. Specifically, it has been argued that the use of reserve seats for women has taken the pressure off political parties to place women on the ballot and may have eroded the competitive power of women to enter parliament through the "normal" routes. The manner in which quotas are effected (through party leadership largely) has also led to a sense that the women handpicked by the parties may be there as a result of favouritism rather than ability.<sup>49</sup> Although the mechanism of implementation is different, critiques also isolate a difficulty evident in the Ugandan study – that of accountability. It is not clear exactly who the beneficiaries of the quota system



represent and this translates into confusion as to whom they are accountable – the electoral colleges, their parties, their geographical constituencies, or women, whose absence their presence seeks to address.

Furthermore the investing of power of nomination in the parties has meant that they can select women who will not necessarily threaten male power bases and can act as a subtle mechanism to prevent certain women from entering politics. While adopting gender quotas to enhance women's participation there is no single party that has introduced positive measures internally in party hierarchies.<sup>50</sup> This point alone serves to flag the risk of symbolic instrumentalism as against using quotas as a positive tool for transformation.

### **Conclusion: evaluating the impact of gender quotas**

The three case studies have clearly and unambiguously identified that quotas can certainly produce a numerical increase in participation by women. Although the case is not conclusive, that increased profile is linked to legislative and policy changes for women in Uganda and Tanzania and in all three cases, the importance of quotas in creating positive role models was emphasised. On the other hand, a further conclusion must be that, if used in isolation or understood as being sufficient to facilitate or bring about women's wider equality, the mechanism is vulnerable to political manipulation and is of limited transformative power.

While care must be taken to compare like with like, the experience in the Nordic countries illustrates that when embedded in a number of contexts (the evolution of democratic institutions over long time, the evolution of a welfare state, the presence of a dynamic and autonomous women's movement) and of other mechanisms, (the development of women's policy machinery, equality legislation) quotas are an extremely powerful tool for both change and transformation.<sup>51</sup>

Notwithstanding the fact that that model is not applicable in an African context, we can still usefully keep the Nordic experience in mind when exploring what happened with the introduction of quotas in our three cases. As we know quotas did not emerge from a long tradition of independent women's movement activity on the ground or as a policy tool from a kit bag of other complimentary equality measures. In one case, the

state is itself authoritarian and democratic norms such as national elections do not apply. So reflecting the realities of life in Eritrea, Uganda and Tanzania, where can our case studies lead us?

They reveal a very ambiguous record on the role of quotas in changing public perception and attitudes of mainstream politicians or on shifting the values in the system. In other words, there's no evidence that quota-use breaks down the existing gendered order ensuring that, over time, women will no longer need special supports to get into power. In Uganda, the NRM brought women into parliamentary politics without advancing strategic gender interests and prevailing gender relations have not been fractured. It has been argued that the quota system does not go beyond a sex-gender redistribution to tackle underlying structural inequalities, including class inequalities, which leave poorer women particularly disenfranchised.<sup>52</sup> In Tanzania, although political parties consider the mobilization of women important to their strategic needs, the use of quotas has not brought about any concomitant attempt by the parties to transform how they work so that women could hold positions of power within the organisations. In addition links with women's organisations and elected women are weak and few strategies for collective action have emerged from within civil society to support parliamentary initiatives for women.<sup>53</sup> In Eritrea, the use of quotas rests alongside a state ideology of unity which acts against the advancement of women's special needs or interests or indeed, the recognition of the specificity of women's economic, political or cultural location. Overall, perhaps the best we can conclude here is that quotas can in fact be incorporated into the existing gendered order, if used in isolation, without any necessary transformation.

A striking problem identified by all research participants in the three case studies is problems with accountability. In Eritrea, quota-beneficiaries had no clear picture as to who they represented and therefore to whom they were accountable. The lack of clarity extended to knowledge of geographical boundaries of their physical constituencies. The beneficiaries interviewed did not see the need for women's interests to be expressed or aggregated outside those of the state and did not articulate a vision of how their work at a local level linked into national politics, despite the fact that they were brought into power to represent women locally.<sup>54</sup> In Uganda and Tanzania, quota-beneficiaries explained that they were unable to establish the boundaries or exact nature of their constituencies and that because in practice they overlapped with mainstream

constituencies male politicians saw them as a threat. Unlike in Eritrea, however, many of the quota-beneficiaries here understood that they did represent women's interests and needs. While motivated by the need to bring a gender agenda to national and local government, they felt blocked in the absence of clarity as to who they in fact represented and to whom they were accountable.

As the very idea of quotas assumes some interest women qua women share which requires representation in government, the issue of the women's movement must always be brought into debates about quotas. With a support base in civil society and a relationship of collaboration, women in political office can more easily progress a women's agenda. Women's organisations can be understood as constituencies, if not geographically neat, then in terms of interests. In Eritrea, where civil society effectively does not exist, and sectoral interest representation is undesirable, gender quota use is not likely to produce any other outcome than numerical presence. While there is a national women's organisation, it is managed by the state and is also an instrument of state policy.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, a powerful, autonomous women's movement exists in Uganda. Yet our analysis here tends to a conclusion that expanded women's participation will be inadequate to serve women's interests so long as the institutions are configured in such a way as to preclude the expression of that interest. Hence while the political regime has facilitated their increased participation and the women's movement has successfully struggled to remain autonomous from the state, women find that their efforts are easily undermined by powerful, entrenched (male) interests. This was particularly evident in some key local issues where women's struggle for access to health clinics and services and, for instance, to hold onto spaces in market places was met with resistance from entrenched male attitudes.<sup>56</sup>

As we saw, many women in elected political office owe their loyalty to the president and some have voted against legislation that promoted women's rights.<sup>57</sup> In Tanzania a number of women parliamentarians (including quota women) expressed suspicion about the role of women's organisation whom they view as competition<sup>58</sup> rather than as a support. In addition gender role segregation has remained largely untouched despite the history of women's separate organisation in the revolutionary movement and into the new regime through the use of quotas. Married women still do not have rights to clan land (unlike men) and few are able to purchase land. Women still suffer from

horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market and although there are slightly more women than men in urban areas, fewer women there are economically active than men.<sup>59</sup>

On balance, these challenges can be viewed as part of the process towards achieving greater equality for women (to include women's participation in all aspects of governance) and can be addressed. Some of these challenges are a function of the form of quota use – in particular the use of reserved seats to parallel the mainstream elections – and others of culture and history. It is possible, however, to address many of these challenges and below are five recommendations for doing so.

1. Embedding quotas, as much as is practicable, in the mainstream electoral process and system. Where quotas are an add on their very separateness can render them less important than the mainstream elections in the public perception and can produce constituencies and representative roles which may be ambiguous and stigmatise the quota beneficiaries. In this regard, it would appear that the ANC model of adopting voluntary quotas for the internal candidate selection produces the least amount of negative outcomes.
2. The provision of training for the beneficiaries of affirmative action so that they themselves understand the nature of the tool including its desired obsolescence over time.
3. Gender sensitive training for all politicians to ensure understanding of why quotas are needed and their function.
4. The facilitation of the growth or establishment of an independent women's movement – or at least a removal of all barriers (such as legislation) to this.
5. Civic education in relation to representation and, in particular, the need for special measures to bring in groups which have been disenfranchised.

Ultimately social change is slow and change that requires transformation or shifting of gendered orders can not be expected to move any faster. The record in Sub-Saharan Africa is impressive and does act as a model for how radical change can be introduced at times of transition. Quotas are best used, however, if viewed as one of many means towards a goal of greater equality of women in society and in the polity – not just one of greater numerical representation. If viewed in this manner, then the effective embedding of quotas within the range of supports continues to be a valid tool for women's advancement into all aspects of governance.

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Dahlerup (2002)
- <sup>2</sup> Field research was carried out by the author in Eritrea in 2002 and was published in Kwesiga, Madanda, Ward and Tanzarn (2003). The research emerged from a collaborative project between the Department of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda and the Centre for Advancement of Women in Politics, Queen's University, Belfast, funded by the British Council and the Department for International Development (UK).
- <sup>3</sup> Gender quotas have been widely used in the Nordic countries to achieve this result. However, commentators point out that the mechanism was used in the context of other structural changes such as the development of an extended welfare state and women's increased participation in the labour force and a long democratisation process which included secularisation of society and women's movements activities. See Dahlerup (2002).
- <sup>4</sup> The figures are taken from the Inter-Parliamentary Union website and reflect the situation as of September 2004. See [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.html](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.html).
- <sup>5</sup> Dahlerup (2002)
- <sup>6</sup> Squires and Wickham-Jones (2001) p.7
- <sup>7</sup> Myakayaka-Manzini (2003)
- <sup>8</sup> De Diop (2002)
- <sup>9</sup> Raman (2003)
- <sup>10</sup> By governance I signal, broadly, the analytical recognition that state-centric models are not sufficient to explain policy-shaping and decision-making in any society and, normatively, the idea that other non-state actors, such as civil society organisations, should be involved.
- <sup>11</sup> See Dahlerup (2002) for a good summary of theoretical issues relating to representation and quota use.
- <sup>12</sup> Tamale (2003)
- <sup>13</sup> De Diop (2002)
- <sup>14</sup> Anne Phillips, cited in Squires and Wickham-Jones (2001)
- <sup>15</sup> Lowe Moma (2003)
- <sup>16</sup> De Diop (2002)
- <sup>17</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union: [www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.html](http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.html)
- <sup>18</sup> Eritrea is excluded as national elections in the new regime are pending.
- <sup>19</sup> Tripp (2003)
- <sup>20</sup> De Diop (2002)
- <sup>21</sup> Maboreke (2003)
- <sup>22</sup> Tripp (2003)
- <sup>23</sup> The party is the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ).
- <sup>24</sup> Statistics provided by the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW).
- <sup>25</sup> During field research in Eritrea, I was unable to establish if any formula existed for determining constituency boundaries.
- <sup>26</sup> Tzeghereda (2003)
- <sup>27</sup> Pool (2001), pp.127-8
- <sup>28</sup> van Lieshout (1997)
- <sup>29</sup> Hale (2002)
- <sup>30</sup> Tzeghereda (2003)
- <sup>31</sup> The constitution was adopted in 1986 following a civil war and the coming to power of Yuweri Museveni.
- <sup>32</sup> When the NRM came to power in 1986, the leadership argued that multi-party politics were core to the problem of conflict in Ugandan society.
- <sup>33</sup> Tanzarn (2003), p.31
- <sup>34</sup> Tripp (2000)
- <sup>35</sup> Tamale (1999), pp.194-201
- <sup>36</sup> Tanzarn (2003), p.31
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.34
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid, p.32, citing Maud Mugisha, Chairperson of Action for Development (ACFODE)
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.34
- <sup>40</sup> Tamale (1999), p.195
- <sup>41</sup> Tanzarn (2003), p.35
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.36
- <sup>43</sup> Tamale (1999), p.196
- <sup>44</sup> The party formed in 1977 with the merging of TANU led by Julius Nyerere and the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) that led to the liberation on the island of Zanzibar.
- <sup>45</sup> Meena (2003)
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid. In interviews conducted by the author, women MPs who came through the quota system stated they represented national interests and not women.
- <sup>47</sup> See Meena (2003) and Madanda (2003)
- <sup>48</sup> Madanda (2003) p.22
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Meena (2003)
- <sup>51</sup> Dahlerup (2002)
- <sup>52</sup> Tamale (1999), pp.194-201
- <sup>53</sup> Meena (2003)
- <sup>54</sup> The lack of knowledge about political systems and the relationship between local and national government may not be particular to the women interviewed as the Eritrean state is tightly controlled.
- <sup>55</sup> The NUEW strives for autonomy but is limited by the regime's control of all civil society actors. For instance, it has been given the task of reporting to the UN under CEDAW, on behalf of government and is also tasked with delivering some government programmes such as literacy campaigns for women. See Stefanos (2002) for discussion on the NUEW.
- <sup>56</sup> Tripp (2000), pp.216-19
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Madanda (2003), p.24
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.20

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