

**PARTICIPATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE  
IN MUREWA DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE:  
WOMEN WALKING POLITICAL PATHS!**

**Abstract**

**The writer of this dissertation, a local NGO officer, uses her inside knowledge of the Murewa Rural District Council (“MRDC”) to explore, through the increased participation of women councillors, the potential for their own personal development and that of the district, in general. She collects and analyses a wide range of data utilising several women-centred methodologies (including the Women’s Law and Grounded Theory Approaches) in order to reveal the ‘lived realities’ of several women councillors which, in turn, points to the legal, social, economic and other contexts between which they juggle their private and public lives. In order for Zimbabwe to comply with its international human rights obligations to improve women’s political rights, she suggests, inter alia, the limited use of quota systems and gender-sensitive political education programmes.**

**BY**

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## **DEDICATION**

To my husband John, my daughter Nomathamsanqa Chengetai and to my son John Mzala Junior. **THANK YOU, YOU ARE A GREAT TEAM!**

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The subject matter of this thesis is women's right to participate in issues of local governance and the state's obligation to ensure that women enjoy this right without discrimination and on equal terms with men. Two aspects of women's right to participate in local governance are dealt with: the right to equal participation and the extent of participation. The main focus, however, of this study is to identify the challenges of women who are already in local governance and highlight strategies by which women can be more effective in decision making in local councils. It is therefore against this background that the study seeks to investigate the extent of participation of women councillors in Murewa District.

### **1.2 Background to the study**

My research is informed by my work with rural communities in Murewa as a project officer with the Human Rights Trust of Southern Africa (SAHRIT).

The work involves capacitating rural communities through human rights training and development work using the rights based approach to programming.

I have noted that meaningful and sustainable development can only be reached if women are part of the decision making process. Why Research on participation of Rural Women in local governance? Women partake in development programmes in their majority and are more in touch with issues that impact on the family. Women make up 52% of the world's population at any one time.

Curiosity to find out how the women councillors came to be elected in a rural setting and how they have adapted and coped in a male dominated domain influenced my decision to embark on this study.

### **1.3 Demarcation of the Study**

The research project was done in Murewa District situated 80 km from Harare. The District is divided into 30 local Government wards, which are also divided into 5 Traditional wards, each under a Headman who is the Chief's Aide. Murewa District is headed by one traditional chief. The study was carried out in

five wards, namely 1, 4, 14, 26 and 17. These wards were chosen because they are headed by female councillors. Ward 14 is headed by one of the longest serving woman Councillors while ward 1 is headed by the second longest serving woman Councillor. Wards 4, 26 and 17 were chosen because the women Councillors are beneficiaries of the Zanu-PF<sup>1</sup> party quota system. Overall the wards were chosen so that I could uncover the unique experiences of each woman Councillor, as women are not a faceless homogenous group. Murewa is a strong hold of Zanu- PF.

The people of Murewa survive on an economy of subsistence farming and market gardening projects. It is a typical rural area, with a growth point where the Rural District Council and Government Department offices can be found. The furthest ward is about 45 Kilometers away from the centre while the nearest ward under study is 15 kilometers from the Centre.

#### **1.4 Aim of the research**

The overall aim of the research project is to unearth the extent of rural women's participation in local governance in Murewa District.

#### **1.5 Research objectives**

The study therefore sought:

1. To understand how the legal framework provides for the selection of women into local governance.
2. To understand how the patriarchal attitudes and expectations of the communities in Murewa District influence the selection of women Councillors.
3. To find out if there is a system of quotas that facilitates women to enter into local governance.
4. To investigate how gender roles, workloads and responsibilities between men and women councillors impact on the extent of participation.

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<sup>1</sup> ZANU-PF is the ruling party currently in Zimbabwe, it is the Zimbabwe African National Unity- Patriotic Front.

5. To investigate how the allocation and distribution of resources affect the extent of participation by women councillors.

### **1.6 Research assumptions**

These are the assumptions that I took to the field, to ascertain the extent of women's participation in Murewa.

1. Few women have actually participated as Councillors in Murewa District.
2. The laws underpinning local governance are gender neutral on paper but the processes of selecting Councillors discriminates against women.
3. There is no quota system that ensures women's participation in the selection process of electing women Councillors.
4. Male manipulation and domination, due to the fear that women have invaded men's space in decision making, makes the process of electing women councillors difficult.
5. What are the support systems and structures available to women in Murewa to enhance their participation in local governance?
6. Women's multiple roles, workload, and responsibilities are a hindrance for rural women and their participation in local governance and decision making.
7. Lack of economic resources, coupled with lack of adequate formal education is a hindrance to women's participation in local governance.

### **1.7 Research Questions**

These were some of the questions posed to the respondents:

1. To what extent have women actually participated in local governance in wards 14 and 21 in Murewa?
2. Are the gender neutral laws supportive of women in local governance?
3. Would a quota system impact on the participation of women in local governance in Murewa?
4. Is there any interference and domination of men in the electoral process of women in the local council and in decision making thereafter?



5. What are the cultural, traditional beliefs and practices that impede women from participating in local governance?
6. What are the support systems and structures available to women in Murewa to participate in local governance?
7. Is there any relationship between women's multiple roles, workloads and responsibilities and their effective participation in the local council?
8. How does the level of education and economic status impact on women's decision to participate in local governance?

## **1.8 Structure of the Disertation**

This dissertation is made up of six chapters including the current chapter that contains the introduction, background to the study, demarcation of the study, study objectives and assumptions of the study as well as the research questions. Chapter two discusses the methodological framework. Chapter three deals with the literature review. Chapter four deals with the findings, constitutional and human rights framework. Chapter five continues with the findings discussion and touches on emerging issues and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 2: Methodological framework**

### **2.0 Introduction**

In this chapter I discuss the various methodologies that I used in tackling the research problem and proposing the way forward. In order to uncover the issues affecting the participation of rural women in local governance and consequently the constraints they face and how these affect their participation. It also discusses the different methods that were used to collect necessary data for the study. In order to unravel the myths surrounding rural women's involvement in political decision making bodies a multi method research design was shaped incorporating discussions, interviews, small and informal talks. The use of a multi method was an attempt to uncover the lived realities of rural women Councillors in Murewa District.

### **2.1 Applying the women's law methodology**

The women's law approach was used in the study among other methodologies. The woman's law approach seeks to understand and see the role of law, reality and morality from a woman's point of view. It is a bottom up approach that takes women as a starting point and seeks to understand the women's lived experience and realities with the aim of ascertaining women's position within the law. The women's law approach is a woman centered approach focusing on biological, social and cultural differences of women and men, with a view to establishing an understanding of how laws and policies may have different impacts or may affect men and women differently. The women's law approach can be described as follows

“ This is a woman centered legal discipline which takes women's actual lived experiences and life situations based on sexuality, birth, care and domestic work as a starting point for the analysis of the position of women in law, (politics) and society”  
Dahl (Bentzon et al)

Using this approach it was possible to uncover the lived realities and extent of women's participation in local governance in Murewa District through the eyes of a woman. This approach further refocused the research on women and their life situations, unlike other theories, which embrace the relationships between men and women. Women's needs and their marginalization were finally elaborated with this

approach, which highlighted the gross undervaluing of the activities that women do and the need for a change in the legal, economic and political culture.

## **2.2 Women in Development Approach**

The Women in Development Approach (WID)<sup>2</sup> was also used, where it is argued that in order to arrive at legal equality between men and women all legal discrimination between men and women has to be eliminated. Legal education on such reforms is therefore required to make people aware that there is legal equality. The proponents of this approach argue that there should be legal reforms which abolish all discriminatory laws and policies and believe that, with this done, the playing ground will be leveled in respect to equal access to education, employment, politics etc. This approach is valuable in that it enables a comparative analysis of the legal and social position of women to men and also enables identification of inequalities in the content of laws and policies. In reality this does not happen, so legal equality does not lead to social equality and the WID approach does not look at the differences in women and does not look at women's lived experiences and realities in their different cultural backgrounds. The approach merely looks at the inclusion of women and not real involvement. The WED<sup>3</sup> approach looks at women as the custodians of sustainable development.

Historically however it is within this approach that affirmative action is recommended to raise the platform for women so that the playing field levels out, as it were. The issue of women's spaces is tackled under this approach. So over and above levelling the legal playing field, the argument is that there is a need to create spaces where women are allowed through positive discrimination in order to become equal players.

The WID approach was used in the study project to analyse the gaps existing in the law that may hinder women's participation in local governance. The approach was

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<sup>2</sup> a development approach aimed at the inclusion of women.

<sup>3</sup> It's the sustainable involvement of women with the environment. Its development with women empowerment.

also used to identify how the law, although gender neutral, gives equal opportunity to men and women but has limitations in facilitating the full and equal participation of women in the Murewa Rural District Council (“MRDC”). The approach was also used to uncover the opportunities that exist within the law and human rights paradigm to leverage women’s involvement and entry into decision making positions in local governance. The WED approach was also used in the study to examine how women’s developmental strengths can best be utilized in recognizing and boosting women’s participation in governance issues in Murewa.

### **2.3 Gender Analysis Approach**

A Gender Analysis was employed to examine the sex and gender roles that are different between males and females and how these impact on the participation of women in local governance in Murewa District. This approach addresses inequality as a product of gender constructs based on realization that gender is socially constructed and can be socially deconstructed. GAD<sup>4</sup> tries to influence society to change its attitudes towards women through changes that will benefit both men and women.

This approach takes into consideration the lives of women and questions the validity of roles ascribed to women and men in different societies. By using this approach in the research project I intended to give a holistic picture of a woman’s life, the roles she plays, the people she interacts with, the influence that semi - autonomous social fields (SAFs) have on her life and life chances. The underlying objective of this approach is to facilitate and encourage deconstruction of gender roles and gender relations and to discourage the stereotyping of gender roles.

### **2.4 Grounded Theory Approach:**

The grounded theory approach is the method that was used to make sure that empirical data on the ground was used to come up with evidence and recommendations. In order to come up with findings that give insights and uncover

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<sup>4</sup> GAD is a gender analysis tool that examines the gender differences in how men and women carry out duties and the workload done by the two sexes.

the real experiences of women and their relationship with the law, the research selected respondents that were involved in local governance at different levels. These were the women Councillors themselves; male Councillors as well as men and women involved in the lower level of local governance in order to hear their personal views on how women are participating and to get first hand information from people who work with the women Councillors in Murewa District. The grounded approach was used right from the beginning to formulate the research design and to come up with assumptions that were used to carry out the research. Life stories of women Councillors were solicited and compiled into personal profiles to show how these five women in their different ways made it into political office. Small talk and informal conversations were held with many of the key informants and the women Councillors themselves to solicit sensitive information that would otherwise not come out during a formal interview. However these informal and small talks leave the researcher in a dilemma of whether to use and reveal the information. The approach was therefore necessary in order to get first hand experiences of women in the rural areas and how they interact with the men in local governance.

Choosing Murewa District was also a strategy that I used as I work well and am known by the leaders in Murewa. This was an advantage in view of the fact that the topic is politically sensitive.

To come up with a picture of how women participate in Council meetings, documents such as minutes of meetings and motion papers were studied. It was rather difficult to come up with concrete results as these minutes were summarized and unlike the parliamentary Hansards that report verbatim, council minutes usually reflect what was important to the minute taker at the time.

## **2.5 Human Rights Approach:**

This approach was used to legitimate women's rights to participate in governance issues and particularly as Councillors in the MRDC<sup>5</sup>. The human rights approach framework was used to unravel the extent of equal participation and non-

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<sup>5</sup> Murewa Rural District Council

discrimination when it comes to women's involvement in local governance issues. CEDAW makes particular reference to rural women and requires that state parties must:

“take all appropriate measures to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women in rural areas in order to ensure on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:

a) to participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;

(d) to obtain all types of training and education, formal and non formal including that relating to functional literacy, as well as , inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;

The research therefore sought also to measure compliance with the human rights instruments that are specific to women's participation in governance and development issues. It was also used to measure if the duty bearers and those with responsibility implement the rights for the benefit of all involved. The research focused on the role of the state in complying with internationally accepted human rights norms in relation to the women's participation in decision making and leadership roles and positions. The state of ratification of human rights instruments specific to the study was made and I analysed the level of domestication and implementation on the ground based on the lived realities on the ground. There was also an analysis of the legal and constitutional framework and its compliance with human rights norms. The link between human rights and gender was also analysed so as to determine the gender balance.

### **2.6.1 Data Collection Methods**

### **2.6.2 Sources of Data**

Data was collected from various sources which included the District Administrator, ordinary men and women, women Councillors, male councillors, chief Executive Officer, Council Chair person village heads and ward coordinators.

**Below is the table of respondents that were interviewed.**

Method	Number of respondents	Sex	Political office		
Focus group discussions	7	Male	Village heads		
Focus Group discussions	12	Female	Ordinary women		
Focus Group Discussions	10	Male	Ordinary men		
In depth interviews with key informants	6	Male	2 Male Councillors D.A, C.EO, Council Chair person		
In depth Interviews	7	Female	5 women Councillors, two ward co-ordinators		

### **2.6.3 Interviews**

Interviews were conducted using an interview guide which was formulated using the assumptions to ensure that the right questions were asked. The interview guide was constantly modified depending on the prevailing situation. In this method the main focus was on the interviewees and they were encouraged to tell their story. This was

very useful in that it allowed the interviewees to contribute as broadly as possible and to deeply reflect on their lived realities. The interview method was very essential as it allowed women to express themselves fully and without fear as issues of politics are always viewed with suspicion on the part of Councillors as they fear that information could be used against them when time for the MRDC local Council elections comes in 2008.

#### **2.6.4 In- depth interviews**

In depth interviews were found to be effective in ensuring that the respondent expressed her views, experiences and their life stories especially in the instance of the women Councillors. These in depth interviews enabled me to compile the life stories and profiles of the women Councillors which were used as case studies in the research project. The method provided an atmosphere where women were relaxed and took time to reflect on their lived realities, as in the case of Mrs Njenje whom I interviewed at the community Centre which is a product of her developmental efforts. The same method was used for the male Councillors and they were able to express themselves freely about what they thought of having women Councillors in the MRDC. This method was extremely effective as it allowed for candid talk between the interviewees. The method permitted development of dialogue between the researcher and the respondent, thereby creating a more natural form of exchange which allowed the respondents the freedom to express their views more meaningfully.

#### **2.6.5 Key Informant Interviews**

This method was used to triangulate the information from the Councillors. The key informants were the the D.A.<sup>6</sup>, the Council Chairperson, The Chief Executive Officer for Council, village heads, and Ward Co-ordinators. These are the people that work closely with the Councilors in all aspects of Council duties.

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<sup>6</sup> D.A is the District Administrator



### **2.6.6 Small Talks and Informal Talks**

These were conducted to elicit sensitive information. These were also useful in that I was able to gathered sensitive information through candid talks with some of the Councillors. I was able to do this because I am familiar with most of the respondents through my work with the community as a project officer with SAHRIT. However at times I was left in a dilemma on whether to use some of the information or not as some of it was uttered in confidence.

### **2.6.7 Focus group Discussions**

These were held with community members of both men and women. A total of three focus group discussions were held. One for women only, one for men only, and one for village heads. It was not at all difficult to get these people together as I conducted these interviews on a day when they were attending a development meeting with SAHRIT.<sup>7</sup>



### **26.7 Perusal of Records**

This was done at the MRDC where the minutes of all council meetings for 2007 were available. It was found useful in finding out the

attendance of women Councillors and what motions, comments and contributions they had made in the council meetings.

### **2.6.8 Case Study**

In order to avoid essentializing the rural woman Councillor I decided look at the rural woman Councillor in her working environment and understand her identity, skills and

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<sup>7</sup>SAHRIT- Human Rights Trust of Southern Africa

capacities. The case study, as a method of data collection, is especially suited to capturing the experiential description by studying the uniqueness of the particular and using or extrapolating it in order to understand the universal (Elliot, 1990; Simmons, 1996). Case studies were compiled on certain individual rural women Councillors based on the narrative data and then they were compared with each other using cross case analysis which entailed comparing themes and common patterns across cases which expanded my understanding of how rural women participate in the local Council.

## **Chapter 3**

### **3.0 Literature Review: Why is it important that women Participate In Decision Making?**

Women make up 52% of the world's population and yet they are least represented in political constituencies. Women are only represented in local governance by % world wide. Statistics the world over where they are available have shown that women are the least represented in local councils and local governance structures. According to Graff I, (2003:10), it is evident that if women are to enjoy justice, freedom, equal rights with men, they themselves have to do the necessary work and obtain these goals. No one, no matter how powerful, will be able to give women de facto equal rights and control of their own lives, these are rights every woman has to strive for. Political participation is one of the ways through which these goals can be achieved.

There are other factors why women should participate in political decision making, these being that women's participation will benefit larger groups of people including children. Women constitute a vast unused resource that is lying idle and yet this resource can be tapped into, for the benefit of the larger society. Women also view and value political issues differently from men (I have not been able to find studies that substantiate this claim). However in the research project there was evidence to show that women are inclined to "soft" issues such as welfare, equality, environment, education and health. While men show interest in "hard" issues such as policy, economy and transportation among others. Some assert that an increase of women in political decision making positions will reduce the extremely high level of political corruption we find in many countries. Women are simply believed to be more honest than men. However, it has proved difficult to find scientific evidence of this presumption. Graff I., (2003:11).

According to the Beijing Platform of Action,

"Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved."

This suggests that it is a right that women should participate in public office. According to international and regional human rights instruments it is a woman's right to participate in political decision making processes. According to CEDAW<sup>8</sup> art 7, women are entitled:

- a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and to perform all public functions at all levels government;
- c) To participate in non – governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

This is also reiterated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights art 25, where every person has a right to:

- 1) take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- 2) To vote and be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage...

Three core rights are identified here. They are: the right to vote, the right to stand for election and a general non discrimination principle in elections.

Various other human rights regional instruments such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the Women's Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights entitle women the right to participate in political decision making process. However, it is has not been easy for women to realize these political rights and where they have been successful they have met with many obstacles.

Few women are standing for political office in Zimbabwe, and even where they do, in a societal context where men are regarded as decision makers, persuading the electorate to vote for female candidates has yielded little results, Tsanga A.S (2002:230). In recognition of this truth that there has been a call for quotas in recent years in a bid to boost the number of women entering political office. The major

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<sup>8</sup> CEDAW Convention on the elimination of discrimination against women

political parties in Zimbabwe, ZANU- PF and MDC<sup>9</sup> have now passed a resolution on the implementation of the quota system within their party structures. The resolution, however, is not being enforced or implemented in full. According to Tsanga A.S (2000) quotas when enforced, would most likely play an important role in accelerating the entry of women into politics. In a system of proportional representation, emphasis is placed on the electoral success of a party. Whereas under a single member district system, the election of one member over another is decisive. An electoral system based on proportional representation and specific quotas is therefore a significant, though not the only necessary, step that could improve the number of women in national politics in Zimbabwe. In Murewa District where my study was conducted, ZANU- PF party has implemented the quota system and achieved 30% representation of women in the local Council.

According To Karam Aet al, (1998:2) the challenge however goes beyond ensuring the election of larger numbers of women into the legislatures. Patriarchy, subordination of women, and the deep-rooted perception that the public domain is reserved for men and that the social contract is about the relationship between men and government and not citizens and government, come together to exclude women-notwithstanding rights guaranteed in law and political rhetoric of good governance and participatory democracy. The challenge for women is how to challenge or negotiate with patriarchy until they enter the spaces that patriarchy tends to dominate. The field of politics is historically one that is dominated by men. Many commentators have argued that politics has historically been the most explicitly masculine human activity of all. This has been despite the fact that laws give the same opportunities and rights for men and women to enter into political office. Traditionally women's primary occupation has been to look after their families, cooking, attending to family needs, caring for the sick and generally being there for the family. The public domain has been reserved for men. Society was thus has been socialised to believe that women are not capable of holding public office.

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<sup>9</sup> Movement for Democratic Change

Where women have managed to enter political office they are faced by new obstacles that constrain their capacity to function. Women have faced challenges such as the culture, values and style found within the institutions that perpetuate inequality and protect the privileges enjoyed by men, Goetz A.M and Hassim.S, (2003). The other factor that also works against women is that they were left behind for far too long and they have to work harder and put in more time to cover the gap. In the rural district councils women's lives are still fashioned under traditional norms and, therefore, although it is assumed that women will find it easier to enter political office at this level, this has not been so. The general lack of resources also impedes women from carrying out their duties effectively.

There has also been the issue of patronage as it appears that most women are patronized. It has implications of there being a big brother or protector to whom the politician owes allegiance.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **4.0 Extent of participation of rural women in local governance in Murewa District**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the research findings in light of women's right to participate in local governance and the state's obligation to ensure that women enjoy this right without discrimination and on equal terms with men. Discussion on the institutional framework explains how the local governance structure is set up and the opportunities that exist for women. The chapter also highlights the challenges faced by women who enter into political office and for those faced by women who are in the MRDC.

#### **4.1 Institutional framework**

The Rural District Council is the local governance structure in the Rural District. It is semi autonomous, and legally responsible for the planning and implementation at specific government functions. For effective administration, Council is divided into committees. These subcommittees are responsible for helping council to make effective and responsible decisions with regard to their area of expertise. A sub-committee is a small committee set up to deal with a particular issue. Each committee has a chairperson. It is important for the members of these committees to have knowledge of the committee's work. In the MRDC there are sub committees for: Finance, Social Services, Natural Resources, Human Resources and Planning and Works. The chairperson of the committee takes the information and decisions from a committee to a full council. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is responsible for implementing the Council's policies and managing the organisation in an efficient and accountable way, together with the staff. There are 30 wards in Murewa District which are headed by 30 councillors. They are the creation of the national legislation: the Rural District Council's Act of 1988 Chapter 29:13. Each Councilor represents a ward and is elected by the community.

The institutional framework provides for many opportunities for women to be elected to the council in order to participate effectively. Women, if they are elected, may become chairpersons of sub committees or members of sub committees in respect of

their area of interest and expertise. The institutional structure provides structures where women can have significant influence. The structure provides an opportunity for both men and women Councillors to make a significant impact on the political development of the MRDC through both small and the larger fora, (full council meetings and debates). The structure of the rural district council was developed with a view to make it easier for women to participate in local governance at the local level. It was assumed that it would be easier for women to enter into this local political office. However it is a little more difficult for women to enter into local politics because the traditional way of life is fully observed and some of the traditional attitudes make it difficult for women to access political office at this level.

In Murewa there are 10 Women Councillors and 20 male Councillors. The Council offices are situated at Murewa Growth Point normally referred to as Murewa Centre. The women Councillors who were researched have to board a bus to the growth point. The nearest ward which is ward 11 is situated some 10 kilometers from the centre while the furthest which is ward 1 which is about 45 kilometers away from the centre. Thus the institution is not easily accessible to the women Councillors. The District administrator's office and other government department offices are situated at this central point.

The Council is a structure which is supposed to oversee the well being of the people living in this district. The local people, men, women and the youth are given the opportunity to air their views on their needs and interests at community meetings. It not clear however if a gender analysis is done in order to ascertain the needs of men, women, boys and girls in coming up with development projects meant for the advancement of people's lives. All the sections of the community attend these meetings but women do not normally speak out, although they make up the majority of the people attending as well as 52% of the population. As a result, it has become one of Council's initiatives to conduct civic education in order for the community to appreciate the importance of women becoming Councillors and how important it is for women to speak out about their problems without having to wait for men as well



as having women occupying leadership positions. However the unavailability of resources has limited the number of such activities to be conducted for the community.

#### **4.2 Councillor's Role and Function**

Councillors represent 30 wards in Murewa District. They meet on developmental issues of the district and are the employers of the Chief Executive Officer and other MRDC Secretariat. Councillors also attend to requests from the communities that are relayed to them during community meetings as their duty is to serve the community. The work of Councillors among other things is to make sure that there are adequate services for the people such as roads, water and sanitation and general development of their wards. A male councillor and one of the women councillors interviewed during the study described their roles as follows:

1. Organise and convene ward meetings (community meetings) to discuss matters of development and to give the opportunity to the community to air their views on all aspects of their lives.
2. attend to community developmental needs such as draught power, hunger, agricultural needs, infrastructural development, unemployment.
3. Distribute humanitarian assistance such as maize, clothes, food for work and any other activity that requires their input.
4. Implementation of empowerment projects: Councilor of ward 14 said that she has implemented projects on skills training for women such as soap making, savings clubs and for the youth she has managed to initiate gardening and poultry projects.
5. Attending meetings at church, schools, village functions and other important community functions such as funerals and weddings.
6. Attending council meetings both full and subcommittee meetings.
7. Attending to council business such as officiating at functions, attending workshops and other related issues.

Most of the Councillors cited inadequate resources as hampering their operations and development plans in the individual wards. The women councillors pointed out that if a councillor is not well known and does not have influence within their political party, they struggle to access sufficient resources to implement development projects. If one has political muscle, resources are forthcoming. The Councillors, both male and female, cited that the allowances they get for transport and lunch are way below the inflation rate. They resort to using their own resources to get to and from the council.

#### 4.3 Rural Women leaving footprints in the sand in Murewa Rural District Council

The research uncovered that out of the 30 wards in Murewa, there are ten women councillors as indicated in the table below, making up 30% of the councillors in Murewa District Council.:

Ward	Name	Comment/ Status
Ward 1	Resta Zvinyangoma	Second longest serving woman councilor and Chairperson of the Finance Sub Committee and the Human resource Committee.
Ward 3	Mrs R. Svosve	Serving her first term as councilor
Ward 4	Mrs. E Mapuranga	Serving her first term as Councilor: she is also the leader for The Chimbwido and Mujibha, Secretary for women's league
Ward 11	Mrs Hunidzarira	Serving her first term in Office
Ward 14	Mrs Plaxedus Njenje	Longest serving woman councilor with 4 terms in office, Chair person of District AIDS Committee Chair person and Also served as the Chairperson of the Social Services Sub committee.
Ward 17	Mrs A, Marimo	Serving her first term as Councilor

Ward 18	Mrs C. Kadiri	Serving her first term as Councillor
Ward 26	Mrs R Zuva	Serving her first term as Councillor
Ward 5	Mrs T Gurure	Serving her first term as Councillor
Ward 19	Mrs M Masore	Serving her first term as Councillor

The table clearly shows that women make up 30% of the councillors in Murewa District. The women Councillors are all affiliated to ZANU – PF party. They have a history of involvement in the liberation struggle as well as of participation in the lower levels of the local governance structures such as village community workers and village health workers. The women are all married and staunch supporters of the ZANU- PF party. The profiles seek to unravel the lived realities of women councillors. The profiles of the women provide a window through which to obtain an initial peek into the world of Murewa local governance politics which, in turn, raises the curtain on the larger study of the dynamics of the processes of rural women’s engagement with formal politics. It provides a starting point from which to delve into the main theoretical concepts.

#### 4.4 Life profile of Mrs Plaxedus Njenje Woman Councillor Ward 14



*Picture showing Mrs Plaxedus Njenj having a discussion with the ZANU-PF ward co-ordinator for ward 14. 13/11/07*

Mrs Plaxedus Njenje was born in Murewa in 1956. She was educated up to form two and she is married with children. She ascended in to political life in 1987 when she was appointed Councillor when the then Councillor resigned. She was seconded to this position because of her work as a village health worker and also her participation in the ZANU- PF party women’s league activities. She describes herself

as “having cried with joy” when her appointment was announced. She said her appointment was sanctioned by the traditional leadership, these being the Headman and the village heads in her ward. She had become the only woman Councillor in Murewa District.

Mrs Njenje says that when she got into council she was overwhelmed at first, being the only woman Councillor in council at that time. With support from the Council Chief Executive Officer and the District Administrator as well as the District ZANU-PF leadership she managed to find her feet and to settle into the heart of things. She has been Councillor for the past ten years. During her terms in office she has exerted herself to prove that women can be just as good leaders as men. She has worked hard to become a model for other women who want to become councillors. In order to prove herself, she has had to behave well and in the manner expected of a married woman and mother. She says her husband has supported her throughout her career because he was assured by the male leadership that would “keep an eye on her”, in other words, protect her. By this they meant that they would make sure that she remained a properly behaved woman who was not promiscuous. Mrs Njenje is currently serving a fourth term in office. She said that good behaviour and faithfulness helps one to secure support from one’s spouse as the fear expressed by most men about women being leaders is that they might end up being involved in extra marital affairs.

Mrs Njenje says that as Councillor, one of her goals is to work for the upliftment of women and for women’s rights. She says that although she encourages women to know and claim their rights, she also cautions them not upset the status quo by making sure that they continue to give their husbands space as heads of the families and conforming to the traditional norms as expected by their rural communities. Mrs Njenje said that she has initiated projects that would economically empower other women.

## **Education**

When asked whether she thought education impacted significantly on her role as Councillor, she said that it is of major importance that a Councillor should be educated as one has to read council minutes, council procedures and to put forward motions, read newspapers and reports so that one keeps abreast of events. She gave an example that in committee meetings it is important to understand and contribute to discussions as they reflect an area of expertise and if one is not educated, meaningful participation may be limited. She said that she had noticed other women Councillors who do not have formal education struggling to understand issues and procedures in these meetings. Most women councillors who are not educated do not participate during debates in full Council meetings and are only comfortable doing work in their wards where they use their own language. This makes these councillors appear incompetent. Mrs Njenje also attributes her competence to the capacity development workshops and civic education she received from organizations such as ZWAPP, SAHRIT, Ministry of Youth Gender and Culture, the Ministry of Health and ZWLGA. However she comments that such training programmes should be offered continuously.

## **The quota system**

One of the assumptions of the study is that: there is no quota system that ensures women's participation in the selection process of electing women Councillors, and Mrs Njenje expressed her opinion on what she thought of the quota system being practiced within ZANU- PF. She said that she believes that the quota system is good for women. It has brought an opportunity for women to enter Council in large numbers. Mrs Njenje believes that the quota system is a tool that can be used to break male domination in the area of politics and that without quota systems, it would be very difficult for women to penetrate into the field of politics in this strong patriarchal society. For Mrs Njenje the quota system is long over due and she supports its implementation. Mrs Njeneje wants to serve as a mentor for women who access council office through the quota system. She said:

“I am now experienced and I am willing to show the new players the way and to strengthen and give my full support.”

Mrs Njenje believes in fighting for women’s rights but regrets that she has no real training in the field. She laments that with proper training she could be in a better position to represent women. I have only received training in Human Rights through the SAHRIT.

#### **4.4.1 Political profile for Mrs Resta Zvinyangama Ward 1**

Resta Zvinyangama was born in 1974 and is married with four children, 3 girls and one boy. She comes from Ward 1 (Madamombe village) and she was educated up to O’level. She became a Councillor in 2005. Prior to her being Councillor she occupied a position of leadership as the ward coordinator and village health worker and also was active in politics as the Secretary to the village head and also as the District Secretary for ZANU-PF. In 2005 the then ward Councilor died and she was approached by the leadership to run for Councillorship. She said that:

“at first I was afraid as I believed that such positions were for men as, I had only seen male Councillors as I grew up and thought that such positions were the preserve of men, not just men but men who were much older than me”.

However she was supported by the male leadership in the District to campaign and was endorsed as the candidate. Resta’s husband allowed her to stand for elections because the District Chairman went and asked for his permission. The leadership had to seek permission for Resta to participate in politics and to take up a leadership position, because there is the belief that women will be exposed to bad influences and temptations as they will be sitting next to men at workshops during meetings and also at times they have to spend time away from home in hotels which are associated with promiscuous behaviour. The belief is that occupying a leadership position and the freedom and exposure it implies is synonymous with promiscuity for women. The women folk in Resta’s family from her in laws’ side were at first against Resta becoming a councillor and even tried to pressurize her husband to refuse her permission to accept the leadership position. During the by-election campaigns for councillorship she was being de-campaigned by men who did not see it as appropriate for women to be councillors. They

used gender to de-campaign her. They went forward saying that women cannot work long hours because of family commitments and that politics is a domain for men and women should stay at home in the kitchen. Women in ward one were excited to have a woman as a candidate and they gave overwhelming support because women were tired of being represented by men as they believed that men have dictatorship tendencies and did not represent women well in council. Resta's role as village health worker and involvement with politics as District Secretary for ZANU- PF also gave her leverage to be a candidate. At this time the SADC Maputo Meeting had taken place advocating for a quota system of 30% representation of women at all levels of leadership. The party leadership in ZANU-PF party was pressured by the women's caucus for women representation also to adopt the quota system in its structures. To secure its women electorate the ZANU-PF leadership felt that they had to comply and called for the enforcement of the quota system. The party leadership felt that in order to maintain control they had to use women who were already involved with the party and the community and had its male leadership support women like Resta.

Resta described her initial experiences in council debates and meetings as dominated by male Councillors, men who wanted to show that they are men and have been in politics for longer. The male Councillors did not want to listen to the women councilors and interjected while they were speaking and passing comments such as

“You women should keep quite, you are new in the field and let us men debate”.

Resta realized that in order for her to participate fully in meetings and debates she had to acquaint herself with the debating procedures and to assert herself and thus she would seek advice from the Council chairperson and Chief Executive officer to explain to her how council business was conducted and how to proceed in meetings and debates. The odd workshops conducted by the Ministry of Gender youth and culture on leadership for women also helped her to understand and to learn how to conduct herself as a leader and how to participate meaning fully in council meetings and debates. However she said most things she learnt through experience, and through trial and error. There is no real

induction for Councillors conducted by the council. Resta is also the chairperson of the Human resources and Finance sub committees within council and she said to acquaint herself with her role as chairperson of this committee, she had to seek an induction and find out the terms of reference as she was not aware on how to proceed as chair and how to run the meetings for this committee. Male councillors in these Sub committees at first tried to dominate and undermine her role as chair due to her inexperience. Resta attributes her keenness and ability to her education. She notes that lack of education for women is a set back to their involvement in politics and council issues.

### **Quota System**

On exploring how Resta views the system of quotas within ZANU- PF, she says she believes that the quota system is good for women:

*“...its good, its been long over due, as it is the only way that most women can enter into politics as this is an area that has been dominated by man and the belief has always been that councillorship is a preserve for the elderly men in society who are wise and have a an economic influence. Our partriachal society as it is currently, does not freely allow women to make choices to enter into politics”*

I fight for women’s issues and rights and push the women’s agenda although I have no training in gender and women’s rights. I do this through creating and bringing programmes that are economically empowering for women. Women are the back bone of the family and so they have to be self sufficient. If anything goes wrong in the family, the mother is the one that people look to. I also encourage women to take up any type of leadership position that may arise within the ward. I try to become an example to other women so that they can emulate me.

### **The Family**

I have had to put in extra hours in order to balance my family and council duties. My husband has learnt to adjust, he now helps me with work. We have young children and at times he has had to wash and cook for the children when I am away on council duties. He now appreciates the fact that I have to be away and at times I can not do the normal family duties.



#### **4.4.2 The Political Profile of Mrs Everjoice Mapuranga**

Everjoice Mapuranga was born in 1948, is married with 7 children, 5 girls and 2 boys. She is the councillor for ward 4 in Murewa (Muchinjike). Her educational level is ZJC (form 2). Her involvement in politics began during the war of liberation where she was a leader for the Mujibha and Chimbwidos (war collaborators). She has been the secretary for the village assembly as well as the women's league and later became the chairperson of the women's league in Murewa District. She is also a pre school teacher. Mrs Mapuranga is also a pastor in her church, Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. She became a Councillor when she was nominated as the party candidate on the basis of the party quota system as well as having a better C.V than the six men who had presented themselves for nomination. My advantage also over the men was that I participated in the liberation struggle.

#### **Education**

On education she says that it is important for one to be educated in order to participate effectively in council politics. Education is important. If one is not educated it will be difficult to cope as council memos and minutes are written in English. The other important factor about education is that the Zimbabwean population is well educated and one has to keep up. Our communities are full of teachers, and other retired civil service personnel. In fact council business is conducted in English, you enter motions in English. The male Councillors are said to favour conducting meetings and debates in the English language. If one does not have any form of education it is difficult to keep up, and make meaningful contribution as development is now centred on modern ways of thinking and modern models. Education I believe is also a set back for older women who may want to be councilors (even if its not a requisite that one has to be educated to be a councilor) because most of the older generation is not educated and this acts as a set back.

#### **Quota system**

On the system of quotas Mrs Mapuranga says that it has been a positive move as women have been waiting for its implementation. Women were being left to campaign for men and to support the male candidates all the time. The system has finally put more women

into public office in Murewa District. She hopes that the system will end male domination in Council politics. She however feels that men were not appreciative of the quota because there were imposition of women candidates in some chosen wards.

### **The family**

Mrs Mapuranga said that the family is centred on the woman. All the household work is left to the woman. Women have to work very hard in order to meet both the needs of the family and also to attend to council business. She said that nothing changes in terms of a woman's role in the family and household. Instead a woman has to find ways to cope with the increased workload of holding public office and managing her household duties.

“I find that because I have to fulfill my duties as both a councilor and mother. I have to put in extra hours. I have to attend to household chores, and to attend to the fields as this is the agricultural season”

Mrs Mapuranga said that she has had to be innovative and divide some of the chores with the children (part of extended family) that she cares for and lives with. This arrangement has enabled her find time to attend to council business as well as to attend to the electorate and development projects happening in her ward. Mrs Mapuranga's is lucky that her children are older and are taking care of themselves, unlike other Councillors who have to cope with the extra duties of caring for younger children. However she still has to attend to her husband's needs, lest she is labelled a woman who is now competing with her husband because of the leadership position that she occupies. My husband is supportive of my position as he realized that there is some economic advantage to be obtained from it.

### **Resources**

Mrs Mapuranga says that the allowances they get are not adequate and she sometimes feels councilors are doing charity work. The big advantage is that the position exposes them to opportunities which are financially attractive. As a councillor one is able to access land and agricultural inputs. The position gives councillors status, recognition and respectability in the community. Resources allocation in council is poor. She says that the male Councillors who are well positioned and have strong support within the party access more resources for the development of their wards. She reported that some women

Councillors like Mrs Njenje who are long serving and have risen through the party ranks always manage to secure more resources for her ward.

#### **4.4.3 Political Profile of Mrs Resca Zuva**

Resca was born in 1955, she is married with 6 children 3 girls and 3 boys. Her educational level is grade 7. Resca is the councillor for ward 26 (Chamachinda traditional ward). Resca, like all the other women, was elected through the Zanu Pf quota system. She also has a track record of being a village community worker as well as being involved within the party and she also participated in the liberation struggle and has been actively participating in the party activities for a long time. Resca was also approached by the party leadership to run as a candidate for council elections in 2006. Resca is also known for having gathered support for the Member of Parliament. She said if she had not been approached by the leadership she would have never thought or aspired to be in a leadership position above the level of village politics. She said that she had also regarded these positions as being there for men only and that women were there to support them. However she accepted the nomination as she felt that she had been given permission by patriarchy to take part in the council elections. I was happy to continue working in the position that I was then.

#### **Education**

Mrs Zuva says that education is not just about reading and writing, but rather it helps one to understand current issues. She says she has noticed other women Councillors fail to follow debates because they are not educated. She says that at ward level there are many educated people and youths who can challenge you and so it is an advantage if you are educated.

#### **Family**

She says that her husband has been very supportive of her position now because he also appreciates the benefits that come with the position. She believes that in difficult times everyone tends to appreciate the little help they get. The family is centred on the woman. All the household work is left to the woman and being Councillor has not changed this

attitude. She says her workload has not changed, she is still expected to do household duties. She says that generally women have to work very hard in order to fulfill both the needs of the family and also to attend to council business. She is often invited to attend meetings in schools, attend to ward and village functions organized by the community. She organizes and convenes meetings every month end to give feedback from council meetings to her community and to follow up on issues arising. In addition, she has to attend to her fields and the new farm that she was allocated. Her husband is supportive of her being Councillor but she says that he has not yet adjusted himself to her Council position by helping her with her workload at home. She says he still expects her to perform the “women’s duties” in the home.

#### **4.4.4 Political Profile of Mrs. T.Gurure**

Mrs Gurure was born in 1980 and she has two small children. She is also the ward coordinator. She is fairly young recruit of Zanu pf. She was chosen because of her ‘O’ level qualifications. She didn’t partake in the liberation struggle but she is actually a ‘born Free’. She has worked for an NGO in the community as a field worker. She was appointed in order to “lure” other young parents into Zanu Pf through their youth policy. She was a member of the youth league and also went through the controversial National Youth Training programme.

#### **Education**

She has a full ‘O’ level certificate. She also believes that her education gives her a better insight as education means exposure to, through an understanding of, wider world issues. She supports education because it provides a distinct advantage to a person when they are in a position of leadership and decision making.

#### **Quota system**

On the quota system she says: “Why not? Women need to be helped to get into politics because if they are not helped, the majority who aspire for political office may not make it because the men are the ones that are always being nominated and being voted for.” She says that the quota system will also make people get used to putting women in

political office. She is however careful to say that it should not be something that should be used by politicians to promote their relatives, spouses and girlfriends into office at the expense of women who are capable, sincere and keen about occupying decision making positions. She says that the quota system should not be viewed differently from the Legal Age of Majority Act (now the General Laws Amendment Act) which emancipated women and women became majors and took charge of their lives.

### **Family**

She says: “The work is not officially done on a day to day basis but the reality is that people do not live by time tables and issues and problems arise at any time and I have to give my input and be seen to be attending to the people’s problems.” She says that her husband has adjusted well and he helps her with looking after their children when she is away. She attributes his support to the fact that he is a teacher and is educated. She says that he cooks and bathes the children when she is away. He encourages her to spread her wings and take advantage of her position to do well for the community and to grow in her political career. She says that the work can be overwhelming, as she has to deal with people of all ages and people expect her to have solutions to all their problems.

### **4.4.5. Summary of discussion**

The stories of the five women are indicative of the fact that women can do it, women are participating in local governance in Murewa District. While the five experiences are all different, what comes out strongly is the determination of each woman to perform in a male dominated area. The women find ways to balance their gender roles and their roles as Councillors. Their stories also confirm that support from family members is also essential for them to be effective in performing their duties. The five women are doing their best to participate effectively in the MRDC. Education for all five women was important as it helps them to perform at the same level as educated men. From these stories it is clear that women, if given a chance, are capable of occupying political office. From these experiences the maleness of the political system remains unchallenged but the challenge for these women has been to manoeuvre their way into the system.



#### **4.4.6 The Process of Selecting Women Councillors**

Four out of the five women Councillors interviewed have a history of having participated in the Zimbabwe Liberation Struggle (Hondo ye Chimurenga). All the women Councillors interviewed are members of the Ruling party ZANU – PF and are active within the party structures and have a background of working within the lower governance structures, such as village health worker and village community worker level. Mrs Njenje said,

“I was appointed to become councilor in 1997 when the then Councilor resigned because of my work as a village community worker.”

Both male and female councillors have complained that party chiefs target women councilors who are weak, uninformed and are also loyal to the party so as to ensure that their authority is not challenged. The quota system is being implemented on party lines. The Rural District Council Act guides the election process and the Act is gender neutral: it states that any person who meets the requirements may contest. The women who benefited from the quota system said that they were appointed to participate in local governance, they did not choose it of their own accord.

In Murewa the selection process for candidates has raised a lot of concern from the men. Ordinary men and women allude to the fact that women candidates were imposed on them by the high ranking party chiefs. There are wards which were declared female wards. Men were not permitted to contest in these particular wards. Although most of the men welcome the participation of women in the local governance structure they do not want a culture that imposes candidates. It does however appear that some of the women selected are women who are capable of holding their own in political office as demonstrated in the above profiles. Some of the male Councillors insist that some of the women among those not interviewed are not capable and only got nominated because they know someone high ranking in the Zanu- PF political structure.

#### **4.4.7 Using Women's quotas to ensure equal representation in Political Bodies**

According to Karim et al (1998:92), Quotas for women entail that women must constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body, whether it is a candidate list, a parliamentary assembly, a committee, or a government. The quota system places the burden of recruitment not on the individual woman, but on those who control the recruitment process. The quota system aims at ensuring that women constitute at least a critical minority of 30 to 40 percent. The core idea behind this system is to recruit women into political positions and to ensure that women are not isolated in political life. Most quotas aim at increasing women's representation because the problem to be addressed is usually the under-representation of women, which is particularly relevant, since women constitute 50 percent of the population in most countries and Zimbabwe is no exception. Quotas may be applied as a temporary measure, that is to say, until the barriers for women's entry into politics are removed. It is apparent that the representation of women in Murewa District meets the required quota of 30% being called for in all political parties and positions of leadership and decision making.

The assumption that there are no quota systems in place that ensures women's participation has been tried out although not totally thrown out at this stage. It was uncovered that the quota system only exists on party policy and not entrenched in the constitution and is not part of national statutes or Act. This quota system in its current form within Zanu-PF is exploited by men to nominate women who are loyal to them and the party; therefore there is cautious challenge to their authority. There is an issue of the domination of party politics in rural councils. One respondent who requested anonymity said,

“if you don't support Zanu- pf you are highly unlikely to end up as candidate, other parties and independent candidates are prevented from contesting through violence and manipulation of other lower governance structures e.g traditional leaders”



According to the Council CEO the policy on quota system is not yet gazzeted as an Act or Statute. It is only available on party manifestos. The quota system in the Zanu -PF party has enabled more women to become Councilors. The Council Chairperson, however, had this to say about the implementation of the quota system by Zanu Pf:

“ women in Zanu –pf campaigned hard for the quota system to be implemented within the party e.g our own Mrs Zemura who is in the national Assembly it was not just given to them on a silver plater”

There are different issues and views that arise around the discussion of quota system. According to the findings, female respondents both in Ward 1 and ward 14 are in favour of quota system because they say it has given women a chance to become councillors and to have women in leadership and decision making positions, areas which were and still are dominated by men.

“Since 1980 to 2005 men have dominated in Councils, its high time that women are given a chance to lead too.”

Here it is clearly evident that women want other women to occupy positions in the local governance structures. The respondents felt that with women in power, women will represent other women’s concerns as women are aware of the problems facing women as a marginalized group in the community. Women’s views will be better represented at all levels. In the past men brushed aside women’s issues on the agenda as they were not concerned about them. Some of the women and men also said that in as much as the quota system is needed, they feared that it is being abused by party chefs who may use it as an opportunity to hand pick the women whom they see as loyal to them at the expense of those who may be more effective in bringing about development.

“I think that if it is going to be used to uplift those women who are capable and competent then its ok but if its gong to continue to be used to choose women who can hardly deliberate in Council meetings and have no input then I have a problem with that.”

Other aspiring male candidates seem to have a negative attitude toward how Zanu - PF party is implementing the quota system saying that the women councillors are campaigned for and at times appointed by the Zanu Pf, District Committee. They impose their hand-picked women candidates on to their party members. One of them had this to say:

“In the last election the party in a bid to get women to be elected imposed women candidates on us”.

Those who were chosen are known by the chefs and this association is used as influence to climb the ladder.

Trends the world over has been for state parties to embrace the system of quotas as temporary special measures in their national legislation and in areas which include women’s political participation, education, decision making and leadership positions among others. These have worked very well and Zimbabwe can also learn from such countries. There are a number of different quota methods for ensuring that women are represented in political structures. The methods that will be discussed in this study are: quotas through constitution or national legislation and quotas through political parties.

Quotas through political parties have been successful in the Scandanavian countries (Denmark , 34%, Norway,34% and Sweden, 40%, Finland,38%, and 25% in Iceland.) No political clause or law demands a high representation of women in Scandanavia. The success can be attributed to the sustained pressure on the part of women’s groups within parties as well as the women’s movement in general. Women organized pressure to ensure that political parties increased their number of women candidates, that is to say women candidates with a fair chance of winning elections in which they were participating.

Whether a quota system reaches its objective depends largely on the process of implementation. The quota must be embedded in the selection and the nomination

processes from the very start. If they are only discussed at a later stage then implementation and adaptation is difficult. Countries where quotas for women have been written into the constitution or introduced through national legislation include the following countries: Uganda, Argentina, Brazil, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Eritrea, Tanzania, Belgium, Italy and Namibia.

International and regional human rights instruments urge party states to take appropriate measures to promote women.

The CEDAW directs state parties to come up with:

“all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

The government is therefore obliged to put structures and measures in place that facilitate participation of women in politics. The policy on quota systems, instead of being confined to political party policies, can become part of the national policy through an Act of parliament or national statute. Entrenching the system of affirmative action in the constitution will ensure that all women benefit from it regardless of which party they belong to. There is also a need to ensure that the legal and policy framework allows for a constitution that promotes equality between the sexes as a basis for all laws and regulations. The Constitution in section 23 (1) provides an opportunity to entrench the system of quotas and affirmative action to be part of national legislation. This can be done also by incorporating aspects of CEDAW that include:

- Facilitating women’s political participation
- Ways of incorporating International law into Domestic Law;
- Whether there can be independent commissions to monitor the situations e.g Commission of gender equality, Human Rights Commission or Ombudsperson (as an independent office)

Article 4 of CEDAW says such temporary measures shall not be considered discrimination. Of note, too, is that these measures can be discontinued when the objectives and equality have been achieved.

CEDAW art,7, requires that states take appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public office... shall ensure women on equal terms with men....

The government, because it has acceded to CEDAW, is therefore obliged to put in place structures and measures that facilitate the participation of women in politics. In 1997 The Southern African Development Community (SADC) committed member states to ensuring the equal representation of women and men in decision making. It started by calling for with 30% representation by 2005 and now it stands at 50% representation at all levels.

Zimbabwe signed and ratified the International Union of Local Authorities World Wide Declaration on Women in Local Government. It further states that National and local governments are obliged to enforce the IULA through their support structures to ensure women's rights are realized in local governance. From the findings of the research these provisions have not been met as there is no Statute or Act that has been put in place in order to facilitate the participation of women. The Rural Districts Council Act does not include this element of rights and equal status of men and women in elections. The Act does not have a clause that specifically includes women in the leadership structures.

These regional instruments declarations and agreements incorporate the letter and spirit of International Human Rights instruments and therefore this exerts pressure for the government to comply.

The Beijing Platform for Action September 1995: Women in Power and Decision Making outlines a series of actions to be taken by governments, political parties, national bodies, the private sector, the United Nations and Civil Society Organisations in order to achieve the strategic objectives of ensuring women's equal access to full participation in power structures and decision making. The

Beijing platform measures set out a complete plan of how to put systems in place and to put them into practice. It is, therefore, a question of political will for the government to achieve the goal of equal participation and representation.

The use of quotas will have to be debated at length so that all parties involved understand what it is all about. Studies conducted throughout the world have these points about quota systems:



**Pros:**

- Quotas for women do not discriminate, but compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of the political seats.
- Quotas simply imply that there are several women together in a committee or assembly, thus minimizing the stress often experienced by the token women.
- Women have the right to equal representation
- Women's experiences are needed in political life
- Election is about representation, not educational qualifications
- Women are just as qualified as men, but women's qualifications are down graded and minimized in a male dominated political system

- It is in fact the political parties that control the nominations, not primarily the voters who decide who gets elected.
- Introducing quotas may cause conflicts, but only temporarily.

**Cons:**

- Quotas are against the principle of equal opportunity for all, since women are the preference.
- Quotas are undemocratic, because voters should be able to decide who is elected
- Quotas imply that politicians are elected because of their gender, not because of their qualifications, and that more qualified candidates are pushed aside.
- Many women do not get elected just because they are women.
- Introducing quotas creates significant conflicts within the party organization.

#### **4.4.8 Rural Women Walking Political Paths**

This section continues to explore and discuss the findings uncovered by the study on how women have participated, the constraints they face as presented by the law and other support structures.

##### **The Constitution and Laws of Zimbabwe**

The Zimbabwe constitution provides that person in Zimbabwe is entitled to fundamental rights whatever his race, tribe, place of origin, political opinions, colour creed or sex. In its current state the constitution serves as a window dressing process but Sec 23 (1) provides for the opportunity for the inclusion of a strong Bill of Rights that will promote equality between the sexes as a base for all laws and regulations. Currently section 23 (3) of the current Constitution serves as a claw back clause; it discriminates in terms of personal and family law. It further entrenches traditional values that are discriminatory of women. Zimbabwe ratified the Convention on the political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1991. The CEDAW

Committee in its comments on the Zimbabwe report has urged the government to follow the entire letter and spirit of CEDAW. The opportunity to embrace these International instruments exists as Zimbabwe has started a constitutional review process which needs to be continued. For the engendering of the constitution the right provisions need to be included though it does not end there as a lot of other ancillary work that needs to be done: for example, the duality of the legal system presents numerous problems.

Since attaining independence, Zimbabwe has enacted major laws aimed at enhancing Women's rights to counter certain traditional practices and attitudes that discriminate against women. Of note is the Legal Age of Majority Act of 1982, now the general laws amendment Act. It is a piece of legislation that recognizes that women can vote in their own right, enter into contracts, own property in their individual capacities when they turn 18 years of age. It does not stipulate that women can be candidates to be voted for. In my observation it was only meant to make sure that women can vote for men.

The Electoral Act of 1990 enables women to participate by voting in general and by elections and to stand for office, Presidential or Parliamentary. However, this piece of legislation lacks provisions and structures that will raise the platform for women so that the playing ground levels out, as it were. The Sex Discrimination Removal Act entitles women to hold public office on equal terms with men. The pieces of legislation referred to above seem to be making room for women as they seem to promote equality under the law but they lack the necessary provisions which allow for policy formulation which will ensure implementation of the law and structures that will uplift women to be able to participate at the same level with men. In other words the legal framework is there, but there is need to apply policy measures to create an enabling environment for women who are lagging behind.

The Rural District Council Act gives guidance on how to run Councils and sets out the requirements for one to become Councilor. The Act stipulates that any person can become councilor provided that s/he is:

- A registered voter
- Supported by 10 local people who are also registered voters in the same area.
- A resident in the area which is a specific Council
- Not in debt to the Council
- Has not been convicted of any criminal offence.

The Rural District Council guides the election process. However the Act is gender neutral because it states that any person who meets the requirements may contest to become Councillor. The Act has no provisions that are gender sensitive to enable women to contest, e.g it states that one must be nominated by ten people in their area. Because of the patriarchal nature of Zimbabwean Society it is highly unlikely that men will nominate women because of traditional beliefs. The structures are dominated by men, hence, this assertion. The Council Chief Executive Officer concurred when he said,

“The Act is not gender sensitive it is an old Act which does not embrace the spirit of gender equality and the emerging issues of women’s human rights.”

Women do not normally visit administrative offices as they are busy with child care, agricultural and domestic work. In a traditional community/ society men are heads of households and therefore are the natural born leaders, and it is taboo for women to declare themselves leaders. Given all these circumstances, the likelihood of women presenting themselves as candidates is very low/ slim. The language used during the whole process is too technical for ordinary women, its language for technocrats. The structures are male dominated, so the chances of ordinary women being nominated without conscious effort or procedure are very slim. Furthermore the Act does not have a clause that specifically includes women in the leadership structures. The problems in the Zimbabwean Society are about



men enjoying more advantages because of their control of institutions. Discrimination is rooted in almost all traditional social structures. Even where laws have been passed to do away with some form of discrimination there is always the problem that the attitudes that prevail in most administrative structures are against women holding office.

#### **4.4.9 Induction and support structures:**

When they do finally join the MRDC as Councillors, women have grappled with their new, unfamiliar positions through trial and error. They have been left to find out how Council systems function and their exact roles as Councillors. There are few induction courses available for the new Councillors, such as, confidence building and assertiveness programmes. Nor is any effort made to familiarize newcomers with the functions of Council or the role of Councillors. Some women Councillors said that they only had one training civic education course at the beginning of their first term in office. Councilor for ward 1 is quoted as saying:

“ When I became the chairperson of the Human Resources Committee I had to request for the terms of reference after the first meeting didn’t go well.”

The Women Councillors are expected to know what to do and how systems function when they occupy office despite the fact that language used in Acts and policy documents is too technical for ordinary women and require further explanation. The women are at times not supplied with terms of reference or copies of Acts or procedures manuals.

An MRDC Alderman said that:

“Women should be trained and conscientised on what their duties involve as they do not seem to know what is expected of them as councilors.”

Most of the male Councillors have been in Council for a long time due to reelections and are not affected in the same way as the women. The male Councillors are now familiar with most procedures and functions of the Council. One of the male Councillors interviewed also said that as men they share information during their leisure time (drinking beer) after hours. They have a way

in which they share this kind of information. The three male Councillors who were interviewed enjoyed 'O' level education. The Council Chairperson actually said that he reached the equivalent of form two.

The council does not have an induction policy. An induction policy is a tool that makes it possible to familiarize everyone about the functions of Council, their roles, the Rural District Act and other local government policies. In this way every Councillor will be better equipped. There are organizations that offer support workshops and training such as ZWLGA<sup>10</sup> and also the Ministry of Gender Youth and sport and culture. However these organizations, because of inadequate resources, are unable to offer enough workshops for the women Councillors. The women councillors have said that they are appreciative of the training courses but they concentrate more on how women should conduct themselves, like confidence building and assertiveness and do not focus on the real board room politics.

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<sup>10</sup> Zimbabwe local governance association

## CHAPTER 5

### **To be or Not to be Educated**

Lack of formal education has been cited throughout the research as a big hindrance to women councilor's effective participation in local governance as all Council legislation and council deliberations are carried out in the English language. The use of the English language in council meetings was also found to be an inhibiting factor as most women councillors from the rural areas interviewed are less than fluent in English than indigenous languages, less comfortable than men with the use of English in official business. The choice of the use of English in the MRDC which is dominated by indigenous peoples rather than indigenous languages is exclusionary. The use of a foreign language renders women councillors almost incapable of understanding what is required of them in terms of their roles, responsibilities and participation in council. Most people in the rural areas only get to learn and are exposed to the English language in formal education.

The use of English language which some women councillors have less command of, makes them feel inferior. They lose their confidence and this results in the fear of speaking during council debates since those are conducted in English and also minutes are recorded in English. The use of English in council meetings and deliberations is not a written rule but the male councillors who have been in council for a long time accept it as a rule rather than an exception. All Council legislation, minutes and reports are written in English. Motions have to be entered in English. The Council chairperson said that:

“There is low debate by women councilors because they have low understanding of the Acts and politics in general, the environment requires formal education”

Women, without formal education, who aspire to become councillors are discouraged by the use of English, a foreign language. The findings have revealed that male and female councillors are very comfortable when conducting work at the Ward because there they relate better with the community because they use

their own language and most things are also guided by the traditional way of doing things which is a more familiar process than the formalities required when dealing with council issues. The traditional way of conducting business at the ward level creates expectations for women to always conform to the conservative way of deportment as well as always putting themselves below men. However it may be argued that the use of English is insignificant seeing that their work is community based, but it is in the Council board room where decisions are arrived at, where policies are formulated and where issues are institutionalized and it is here where the use of English becomes important. The use of English also becomes important when the councillors attend exchange visits outside of the country on Council programmes. In this respect both male and female Councillors should be well versed and able to articulate their issues and concerns as well as represent their wards well. The issue that also arises is: why should there be a continued burden on decision makers to use English 21 years after independence?

Women councillors who lack formal education can be coerced into signing decisions which they do not understand and with which they may not agree. One of the women councillors from ward 26 however pointed out that male councillors are not necessarily more educated than the women councillors, but they are more familiar with politics and are accommodated better by the system. An Alderman said:

“That women need to be widely conversant with politics, they do not look at the wider environment, they are centered in their communities. They do not challenge issues and decision made by men..”

The above quote also suggests that women are politically socialized than men. Men therefore are more comfortable engaging in politics than women. The gender advantages enjoyed by men also result in their having a double advantage: they are listened to more often because it is assumed that they are more knowledgeable because of political socialization and they are accepted by their communities as their natural leaders.

Women, with formal education, perform and participate better in Council work as demonstrated by two of the councillors interviewed who occupy positions of responsibility in the MRDC. Some of them are chairpersons of subcommittees such as Human Resources, Finance, social services as well as the District AIDS committee.

A perusal of Council minutes did not give a complete picture or bring out the voices of women councillors. Women seem to be silent except in seconding other people on the motions raised. A key informant, the DA felt that women need more than just formal education. There is a need for women to be trained about leadership from the time they are in school so that they develop the necessary skill, confidence and self esteem to take up leadership positions. The women need grooming.

### **5.1 Gender roles and gendered difference in Leadership styles between men and women Councillors**

Gender roles are social roles prescribed to men and women and how they should behave. Women are faced with negative attitudes from both men and women in society. Women are different from men in terms of biological make up, hence some gender roles are ascribed to them such as nurturing of the children from birth. This is not to say, however, that men cannot perform these roles. Firstly, family expectations and household responsibilities act as a barrier to women's effective participation. In reality, the few women who are council members continue to live in families where women's primary work is believed to be in the home rather than the council. Female councillors continue to be tied down to the housework assisting children with homework, preparing evening meals and agricultural activities and hence they work extra hours in order to balance council business and household work. Although council duties do not require that the councillors attend meetings on a daily basis, but when they do take place council meetings can take long hours out of women's everyday schedules. It is this self sacrificing work of women councillors that goes unrecognized.

To come up with linkages between work load and ability to attend meetings a gender analysis of a typical 24 hour work load of men and women councillors was done and the tables below illustrate the gender differences between women councillors and male councillors.

Table showing typical day for a male councillor

07 00	Wakes up and washes himself
07 30	Eats breakfast
0800	He rushes to board bus for the MRDC
09 30	He arrives at the MRDC
10 00	ATTENDS METING
13 00	Meeting ends
13 30	Do the rounds for the government departments to collect information and also to collect different items, messages, notices, etc.
14 00	Goes to the local bottle store
18 00	Catches the last bus home
20 00	Arrives homes and eats supper
20 30	Goes to sleep

Table showing the workload of a typical young woman Councillor

05: 30	Wake up and sweep house and put bath water on the fire
06.00	Washes herself
0630:	Prepares bath water for husband to wash
07 00	Prepares breakfast for children
0730	Washes dishes and gives husband breakfast
08 00	Rushes to get bus for MRDC for council meeting or business

09 30	Arrives at council
10 00	Meeting in council board room
13 00	Meeting ends, at times the meeting may drag on until 15 00 hrs
13 30	Visiting the different government departments and agents for supplies or for answers to different requests made by community. Also to look for information and messages and notices to take back to the community. She does the household shopping for groceries
14 30	Waits for bus back home
17 30	Arrives home and immediately goes to attend to the garden and to fetch water
18 30	Starts to prepare supper
19 00	Attends to people who have come to see her with different problems and issues
19 30	Makes sure children have bathed and that the animals are back in the cattle pen
20 00	Family eats supper
20 30	Gives husband water to bath
21 00	Attends to any mending that needs to be done
21 30	Gathers utensils and puts things right around the home
22 00	Goes to bed

The table shows a typical day in the day of a young woman councillor who has children and has to attend meetings at the MRDC council offices. The table also serves to highlight that any support women get from husbands, children and other members of the family in doing household related work would make a significant

difference in relieving them of valuable time to carry out their duties. The above tables clearly show that women have a very heavy workload as compared to men as women have to perform duties such as washing the laundry, fetching fuel wood, water, cooking, caring for their children and also attending to their gardens and performing their marital duties. Women councillors have to work extra hours as compared to their male counterparts in order to fulfil their family duties and council business. To cope with their heavy workloads, women start their day earlier and end their day later than their male counterparts. For younger women councillors who also have to care for young children (such as the ward 1 councillor) and have no one to share the workload, the daily schedule is even tighter. Fortunately the ward 1 councillor has an understanding mother in law who supports her and looks after the children while she is away. Another ward coordinator for ward 1 said that her husband has had to help her with household duties such as cooking for the children while she is away.

For older women like the Councillor for ward 4 said that her older children take care of the sweeping, washing clothes, fetching water and cooking. She also has a daughter in law who takes responsibility for some of the household duties. This makes her life easier and gives her ample time to attend to development issues in her ward as well as to be commuting to the council offices for meetings. This is the trend among most of the older women councillors. From the above activity profiles, it is evident that gender roles themselves do not change automatically for women when they enter into the MRDC. The expectations and the need to perform socially defined women's roles continue. Women have to balance these with their council responsibilities. This situation is worsened by the fact that there is very little in terms of remuneration. The councillors said that the allowances they are given are not adequate. They say that it is their sense of responsibility and maturity that has kept them going as well as the fact that they want to prove their capabilities as leaders and contribute to development in their area.



They say that the remuneration may be inadequate but the position comes with plenty of opportunities. Because of their positions most of the women councillors were allocated land under the land redistribution programme. They also gain access to drought relief food and other goods distributed by council and other NGOs. The networking and exposure brought by the exposure is good for the women councillors who can always rely on contacts made and created.

Women's work in local governance is defined by their gender roles, i.e., they focus on community needs and interests more than their male counterparts. Women concentrate on development issues that are service-oriented, such as making sure that there are no staff shortages at clinics, provision of food, construction of schools and water and sanitation issues, partly because of their own personal experiences of local services. This is said to be an extension of women's gender roles. Two of the Councilors are prominent in committees dealing with social welfare and HIV and AIDS. This sentiment is echoed in Budlender et al (1999), where this issue is validated by other studies which comment on the tendency for women to focus on the "soft" social sector such as health, welfare and education. Few women become engaged in "hard" issues such as finance, policy making etc. Their predisposition towards focusing on "soft" issues tends to limit the personal growth of women in council, as the "hard" issues are often seen as the stepping stones to national leadership. Most women do not take part in governance issues because they are occupied with economic activities. For all the women councillors interviewed, women's economic independence was a major policy goal to strive for during their term in office. Councillor for ward 14 pointed out that she makes income generating projects for women available so as to make sure that women are economically empowered. Income generating projects are seen as a vehicle through which women can become emancipated, Goetz and Hassim (2003). However income generating projects are a limited strategy of women's empowerment. They make women dependent on funding rather than giving them an independent source of income. Most are low and small scale projects with low income productivity, which do not meet the objective of

generating enough income to provide women with economic independence. In most cases the projects are not properly appraised in terms of marketability of the products. The capital invested is too low to provide sufficient returns to benefit the poor. However this is an opportunity that can be tapped on to improve the lives of women. The council could through gender sensitive budgeting allocate enough resources that can see women implementing better and more sustainable projects that could sufficiently benefit women in the long run.

The male councillors feel that women are not participating effectively as they only concentrate on soft issues and not policy and legislative issues. This observation made by the by male councillors is valid and it is a valuable skill in itself. However women have to combine this skill with the skill of being able to engage with broad policy issues, and broaden their political engagement at the policy level.

Councillor for ward 14 also noted that because her position as councillor has economic advantages her husband has been supportive of her taking up the leadership position for the 4 terms that she has been with the MRDC. He has been very supportive to the extent that at times he does some of the household chores normally done by women on the days when she is overwhelmed by work especially during election periods.

Of significant importance is the observation that none of the 5 women councillors interviewed ran for councillorship of their own accord. They were appointed by the male leadership of ZANU- PF. The male leaders were the ones who asked for permission from the husbands if their wives could stand for election. It was perceived that their wives did not have the power to make the decision to accept. They are still considered minors who need constant supervision. The husbands of the women gave their permission because the male leadership assured them that they would keep an eye on the women to make sure they behave properly. It therefore has emerged that women are still seen and treated like minors who can

not make their own independent decisions and need the guidance of their husbands and the male leadership.

Women themselves have been socialized to think that the position of councillor is for men. Ward 1 councillor had this to say when she was appointed as councillor in 2005:

“ I was afraid, I knew councillors as men, old men. I had never seen or heard of women councillors. The perception of men as the natural leaders is alive and real.”

There is a negative perception that when women occupy positions of leadership they become big-headed. This is a fear expressed by most men interviewed who say that when women become leaders they then want to exert authority over their husbands. The dynamics presented here reveal that men feel that women cannot exercise authority over them, as they are socialized to believe that it is only men who should lead and women should remain in the kitchen. During by-elections some of the women candidates said that men were campaigning against them by calling them prostitutes and of lose morals and saying that “real women do not go about gallivanting<sup>11</sup> all over the show leaving their husbands and families alone.” All the same, the fact is that women are being voted as councillors because of their gender. Ordinary men and women interviewed in the study said that they welcomed women Councillors in the MRDC because women by nature are not corrupt and they are dedicated even though the remuneration they receive is very little. Women are also said to be more democratic than men. One respondent in ward 14 said:

“ Vano gutsa ruzhinji ( they are more democratic) they are not selfish like men.”

Women Councillors were said to be more sensitive to social issues and better able to represent women’s concerns and issues which have been neglected for a long time. In wards 1 and 14 where there are women Councillors, women said that things have improved for them. They said they now get to meet with their

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<sup>11</sup> Gallivanting is used to refer to the mobile nature of political life

councillor, they have a voice and they are listened to, whereas previously their male councilor was not interested in women's issues. Women councillors are more likely to give their communities feedback when they attend council meetings and functions. The distinctive style of women leaders is associated with a more participatory, democratic, sensitive, nurturing and caring approach.<sup>12</sup> The women councillors have also been said to be more transparent than their male counterparts who are said to be corrupt and it is believed that an increase of women in the MRDC will reduce the high level of political corruption that has beset the Council.

### **5.2 Traditional and patriarchal attitudes towards women Councillors: Should the saying remain: "Behind every successful man is a good Woman?"**

The patriarchal society in Zimbabwe has stereotyped society to think that women are not good at decision making. One male councillor was quoted as saying,

"They should manage their households, they are best at managing families and households. Women are overwhelmed by family responsibilities"

However it used to be taboo for women to stand up and speak in front of men in public fora. It is seen as natural for women to play a supportive role rather than to be the leaders so it somehow upsets the status quo when women take up leadership positions. Although the women councillors wield power by virtue of their office they continue to be looked at and seen as being below men. The women Councillor for ward 14 said that: "To avoid upsetting the status quo I always make sure that I put myself below my husband and other male figures of authority in order to survive in the game." Men believe that women especially in the rural areas where the traditional way of life is practiced should confine themselves to family responsibilities. It is therefore clearly evident that despite women being majors in the eyes of the law, customary law requires that they are submissive to their male folk. Women councillors have also blamed male attitudes in their failure to debate in meetings. They say that initially men would adopt

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<sup>12</sup> Gender, women and leadership.AGENDA.2005

dominant and condescending attitudes towards women. They constant question whether women have the authority to participate in politics:

One woman councilor said, “ Here in rural areas men feel that leadership issues are better done by them than us women.”

Despite the MRDC’s efforts through the civil education programme to involve more women in politics, some men still feel that women are better off managing the home saying:

“Women should not compete with men, they do not have leadership qualities, they are short sighted, they do not think of the wider environment they are centred in their own communities. They do not understand politics.”

It is clear in this instance that men feel threatened by women participating in local governance. Women were asked about the assertions that they do not make concrete suggestions or contribute to debate except to second motions rather than proposing them. The women said that men laugh or belittle their contributions hence they end up keeping quiet. According to Goetz A.M and Hassim S, (2003:202)

“Some observers acknowledge that, as relatively new entrants in the system women are at a disadvantage in council debates. Women have to confront men who have been in the business and are more seasoned and sophisticated (interview, April 1999, MukonoDistrict). This sophistication is not necessarily in terms of substance what men have to say but rather the kind of legitimacy they claim, which determines how what they say and do is received and validated”

The traditional attitudes that also exist are that women are supposed to take up their household duties as a primary concern. This is so because there is no established custom of female authority in community decision making. Some women even mentioned that tension and suspicion is created when a woman councillor has to be away at from home in order to attend to the requests of her community. The Councillor from ward 26 says she encountered a situation where one of her grandchildren was accidentally burnt by hot water while she was away attending a funeral of one of the community members. Her husband was furious that it happened while she was away and that she was late in coming back, yet she

did not know that such an accident had happened at home. The assumption here is that women should always be home to attend to domestic affairs.

### **Conclusion**

The findings have challenged the assumptions about the absence of quota systems and there being a low representation of women in Council. In fact it is the quota system within the Zanu-Pf party that is responsible for the 30% representation of women in Murewa District. But, in the case of the 5 women Councillors profiled, is it only the quota system that worked in their favour? It seems that their own inherent capabilities and effectiveness in posts earlier in their lives (e.g., as community helpers at the lower levels of the governance structure) are also responsible for their being chosen as candidates. Education stands out as requirement for effective participation by women Councillors. The case study of the women Councillors demonstrates that there is a need for some level of formal education for effective participation. The five women profiled also confirm that their counterparts without formal education find it difficult to participate effectively especially when it comes to debates and the understanding of political council functions.

The evidence presented in the findings also suggests that women need proper induction and capacity development to enhance their skills for holding public office. There negative gender attitudes and obstacles that lie in the paths of women who occupy political office in Murewa District. The issues that emerge here show that it is not that women are not capable of holding public office but that they need a lot of support and political socialization in order for them to cope with the political environment they encounter. Women also need to combine their developmental strengths with the skills of policy formulation and political debate.

Women have also shown strong organizational skills that enable them to cope with the household demands and their office demands. They just need support

from their families and men in general need to give them space to grow in their political careers.

### **5.3 Concept of Participation**

In ascertaining the extent of participation, theoretical approaches such as women in Development were used to explore the extent of women Councillors' participation. The women in development approach targets women as an underutilized resource in the overall development process. The core elements of this approach strengthen the research objective, in the call for social justice, political equality and increased health and welfare services. This approach supported the assumption that there are few women councilors in Murewa District that are involved in Local governance.

The whole concept of participation implies:

- The sharing of power and of scarce resources
- deliberate efforts by social groups to control their own destinies and improve their living conditions and
- Opening up opportunities from below.

Therefore the whole concept is about development. Participation in this regard needs to bring about structural change that will facilitate change that occurs through taking action. The structural change which needs to be brought about is a legislative and constitutional framework which will allow women to participate and be represented on an equal basis with men. The equality being talked about is to put in place mechanisms that will help women participate without fear or favour. Women are entitled to participate in processes that will bring about change in their lives and to make sure that their interests are taken into account. Women make up 52% of the population and therefore it is imperative that they are represented at all levels of governance structures. These mechanisms referred to can be in the form of quota systems or affirmative action with the aim of giving women equal opportunities to enter into local governance.

The situation at the MRDC is that participation for women is along political lines. This situation needs to be changed so that all women have a chance to participate in the election process for councillors. The 30% representation came about because of the women's caucus within Zanu-PF.

“Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.” (Beijing Platform for Action September 1995)

The Beijing Platform for action under the theme Women in Power and Decision Making outlines the actions that need to be taken into account when levelling the playing field for the effective participation of women in decision making. Real participation will be found to be emerging in the findings when men and women can make decisions side by side with equal representation.

### **5.3.1 Towards effective Implementation of International Women's human rights for political participation.**

The section is a discussion on the various rights to participation accorded to women under CEDAW and other human rights instruments.

The first thing that a state party has to do is to domesticate the international treaties to national laws. In some countries domestication is effected through the adoption theory and through the transformation theory. The adoption theory position is that international law is automatically part of domestic law; that is without an act of incorporation. Transformation theory states that international law is only part of domestic law once it has been incorporated into domestic law, Graff I. (2003).

The domestication of international law means that the legislation must conform to international norms, but is not a guarantee that for the effective enjoyment by individuals of their human rights. To guarantee some form of enjoyment states parties to treaties should also adopt non legislative measures. Administrative, judicial, economic, social and educational measures which are consistent with the nature of the rights are necessary in order to guarantee the effective implementation of human rights treaties. Other measures or appropriate measures



are expressly stated in the Convention. The implementation of the human rights treaties depend on morality, goodwill and conscience. It is therefore important that legislators follow up on the signing and ratification processes of any treaties. CEDAW requires state parties to eliminate any forms of discrimination against women in the enjoyment of all civil, political, economic and cultural rights. It establishes programmatic measures for state parties to pursue in achieving the enjoyment of rights by women. CEDAW calls for affirmative action designed to promote gender equality. CEDAW calls for changing social and cultural traditions that prevent women from enjoying their rights. State parties are called upon in art,5, to:

- 1) Modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of inferiority or the superiority of either sexes or stereotyped roles for men and women.
- 2) To ensure that the family education includes...the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children.

It is therefore clear that the Zimbabwean government has to put the issue of stereotyping according to gender roles high on the agenda and to put in place awareness programmes that will rectify this situation in order to enable women to participate better in leadership and decision making processes.

CEDAW in art,4 also calls for adoption by state parties temporary special measures aimed at accelerating the *de facto* equality between men and women. These measures are not considered discrimination as defined in the present convention, and are intended in no way to maintain unequal or separate standards. These measures must be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved. Therefore the government is obliged to set up a system of special measures or affirmative action as described in a previous chapter in this dissertation.

According to Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art 25 “Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions:

1. To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
2. To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;
3. To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.”

On closer analysis the idea of local governance structures being put into place at the local level is a way of trying to make it easier for women to be part of the political decision-making process. It is considered easier to enter into politics at the local rather than at the national level. Ironically the same system makes it harder for women to enter into politics because at local level especially in rural areas women find it difficult to enter into politics because they are

#### **5.3.1.1 Equality**

The emerging issues on equality clearly reveal that women are not seen as equals and that their accessing political office does not change the gender roles the perception that women are inferior to men. This situation perpetuates the stereotyping of women. The issue of equal representation needs to be addressed either through national or constitutional reform.

#### **5.3.1.2 Accountability**

The issue of accountability is a very difficult one when it comes to the women councillors. Through short and informal talks I established that the women are more accountable to the party hierarchy which was instrumental in women becoming councillors. In whatever decision being made, first and foremost is that

the councilor has to consider the party position. Women councillors have been said to be more visible than most of their male counterparts in the wards. Women are good at giving feedback accommodating and more empathetic, which are characteristics that draw people to them. Women councillors were also said to be more tolerant and dedicated to their work. Women councillors are also said to shun corruption and promote developmental issues. There is a need to create diverse strategies for ensuring accountability of political leaders to those they represent, so that equity and social development concerns affecting the majority also factor into public policy formulations.

#### **5.4 Emerging issues**

The emerging issues, according to the findings, is the important factor that family support is an essential component to the success of women Councillors as demonstrated in the profiles of the five women Councillors interviewed. The family is supportive in that it offers support in the performance of gender roles. Male spouses are also supportive according to the findings performing caring duties for the children such bathing and cooking. Women Councillors have negotiated and manoeuvred their way around patriarchy in order to take up political office. Thus they have not allowed any thing to block their way to public office.

#### **5.5 The ABC's of improving the participation of rural women in local governance structures:**

##### **Specific Training for women Councilors**

- Special training is required for women to capacitate them on policy and legislative issues. They also need training to build their self confidence, self esteem, assertiveness to speak during council meetings/ public gatherings and to teach them skills to better analyze social problems and developmental issues. A gender desk should be established by the MRDC that will help in the distribution and training in gender.

- Both men and women need to be sensitized to appreciate the changing roles of women and to come to terms with women's participation in politics. Male policy makers need to recognize their responsibility to change gender relations in local Councils and in society.

### **Gender awareness training for technical officers**

- The technocrats (secretariat of the Council) of the council as well as the councillors need to undergo gender training so that they can appreciate the importance of the participation of women in leadership and decision making.

### **Recommendations for legal and policy reform**

- As suggested in the body of the write up a quota system on women and governance should be legislated and incorporated into the constitution. The Acts and statutes that regulate the processes of local governance should be gender sensitive and have clauses that will improve the participation of women in local governance. All legislation should embrace the letter and spirit of human rights instruments.

### **Recommendations for institutional reform**

Radicalism may be the solution to women's involvement in politics, e.g., women only parties, and the deliberate creating of 'political' spaces for women so that they can practice the kind of development that they are good at. In other words, men can do the board room politics while women deal with development issues that apply to their day to day lives. The WED<sup>13</sup> approach could be used in enhancing women's approaches to development as they best understand development issues. There is a need to decentralize the work of the council at ward level in order to

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<sup>13</sup> Women in environmental development

accommodate women so that they do not have to travel long distances away from their homes to council offices.

The MRDC should allocate sufficient funds for civic education so that the communities appreciate women as leaders and decision makers. There is also a need for council to come with induction and support strategies for women councillors to properly induct them into the council systems and working culture.

### **Recommendations for domestication of human rights instruments**

The opportunity to embrace these International instruments exists as Zimbabwe has started a constitutional review process which needs to be continued. For the engendering of the constitution the right provisions need to be included though it does not end there as a lot of other ancillary work that needs to be done as the duality of the legal system presents numerous problems. There is a need for Zimbabwe to domesticate the international and regional instruments in order to institutionalize the element of human rights in all political and governance issues. There is also need for the government to conform to human rights standards in the law and in implementation of the law.

### **Socio economic reforms**

There is a need for the council to reevaluate the remuneration for councillors who are burdened with a lot of work and yet receive allowances that are way below the inflation rate. In this way corruption will be minimized. The council needs to come up with a gender sensitive budget that will accommodate meaningful development for both men and women and to allocate resources on an equal basis and to make sure that resources are distributed equally to all wards. There is also need for council to come up with development programmes that are aimed at improving the economic situation of women so that they may give priority

to local governance issues as currently women are caught up in trying to improve their own family's economic status.

### **Women empowerment zones**

Women's organizations should form genuine empowerment zones for women who want to participate in governance issues at grassroots level. The women organizations should offer 'information banks' where women can access information on national politics, world politics and general information that women can rely on to make informed decisions about politics. The empowerment zones could also help equip women councillors with skills and knowledge on gender and women's human rights as all five councillors interviewed claimed to champion women's rights yet they do not have much knowledge about rights nor do they know much about how to champion this cause. At a more advanced level, these empowerment zones could be set up in the form of interests groups both inside and outside political parties. This would provide valuable experiences for women and give them a power base on which to build if they decided to aspire for office<sup>14</sup>. The rural area has a wealth of professional people who were involved in the civil service and they could act as mentors for those women who have never been involved in formal office activity.

### **Recommendations for political parties**

Women should urge political parties to set down clear rules for candidate selection. Women will benefit if parties have established procedures of selecting candidates rather than a system based on loyalty to those in power. When the rules are clear it is possible for women to develop strategies to improve representation. When the system is dominated by patronage, confusion as to whom the councillor is accountable arises. And

decisions are often made by a limited number of people who are certainly always men.

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