

THE IMPACT OF FEMALE MPs ON THE ZAMBIAN PARLIAMENT

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This past summer I embarked on a new three-year research project on Women and Policymaking in Zambia, funded by a Fulbright Fellowship. I am studying the Zambian female members of parliament's participation in policymaking and their impact on parliament. The research is divided into three phases. In the first phase I am researching the participation of the female MPs in the current session. I have interviewed female MPs to find out how they participate and how they are perceived by other MPs. At present there are 24 women out of 157, representing 13.9 percent of the Zambian parliament. Zambia is one of the countries, which does not have a quota system, which accounts for fewer women in parliament and makes it more challenging to increase their number in parliament. The country will have its general election next year. The second phase of the research will be to study women's preparation and participation in the election, and their campaigns and performance during the election year. The objective is to study and compare women's challenges in campaigning to their male counterparts. This will include financial, social and cultural challenges, and how they

impact female candidates. In the third year I plan to study how female MPs are trained in policymaking after they are elected.

Last summer I interviewed some members of parliament to find out their challenges and successes in the current parliamentary session. These included the Minister of Gender and Child Development, Hon. Professor Nkandu Luo; Minister of Tourism and Arts, Hon. Jean Kapata; and the Chair for the Committee on Legal Affairs, Governance, Human Rights, Gender Matters and Child Affairs, Hon. Jacob Jack Mwiimbi. All the MPs interviewed shared that female MPs face tougher challenges when campaigning and fundraising. Prof. Luo who is popular in her constituency said that she has found that what works against her is her high level of education. A former University of Zambia professor of microbiology and immunology, she said she sometimes draws negative attitudes from both men and women because she is very assertive in the way she likes to get things done and dresses, for which she stated: "I do not apologize." In a previous parliamentary session, she was asked to leave the chambers because some male members said her

dress was "too short." She said although such attitudes may persist she enjoys overwhelming support in her constituency. Hon. Jean Kapata reported that one of the major challenges women face when they participate in politics is campaign financing. Hon. Mweetwa asserted that without a quota system Zambia will continue to lag behind in having more female MPs due to the financial and social and cultural challenges they face.

One of the highlights of the current session was the bill on gender equity and equality. It is one of the major bills that are intended to improve gender relations and gender policies in the country

I also spent time researching the activities of the organizations that work with women to assist in increasing their numbers in elected office. The Zambia Women's Lobby Group is the main organization that trains and works with women to get them elected in local and national positions such as councilors and members of parliament.

The other objective of my project is to engage the faculty and students in the University of Zambia's gender department in monitoring the activities of female candidates for government office. I held a workshop with young Zambians from various organizations to discuss the status of women and to encourage and broaden the exchange between academics, activists and female politicians.

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