



REPORT OF THE SADC PF REGIONAL WOMEN'S PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS TO THE 53RD PLENARY ASSEMBLY SESSION
THEME: "LEVERAGING THE SOCIAL MEDIA TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE SADC REGION".

Mr. President, I beg to move that this Plenary Assembly do adopt the Report of the Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus to the 53rd Plenary Assembly Session of the SADC Parliamentary Forum, laid on the Table on 4th July 2023.

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1.0 COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee consisted of the following Members:

1. Hon. Regina Esparon Seychelles, **Chairperson**
2. Hon. RAMAROSOA Emiline RAKOTOBÉ, Madagascar; **Vice Chairperson**
3. Hon. Ruth Mendes, Angola
4. Hon. Teresa José Adeline Neto, Angola
5. Hon. Hon. Anne-Marie Mbilambangu, DRC
6. Hon Nadine Mangabu Luabeya, DRC
7. Hon. Sen. Princess Phumelele Dlamini, Eswatini
8. Hon. Marie Jeanne d'Arc MASY GOULAMALY, Madagascar
9. Hon. Rachel Zulu, Malawi
10. Hon. Roseby Gama Gadama, Malawi
11. Hon. Marie Genevieve Stephanie Anquetil, Mauritius
12. Hon. Marie Joanne Sabrina Tour, Mauritius
13. Hon. Jerónima Agostinho, Mozambique
14. Hon. Maria Marta Fernando, Mozambique
15. Hon. Utaara Mootu, Namibia
16. Hon. Agnes Kafula, Namibia
17. Hon. Emilia Nuyoma Proxy for Hon. Paula Kooper, Namibia
18. Hon. Rosie Bistoquet, Seychelles
19. Hon. Nkhensani Kate Bilankulu, South Africa
20. Hon. Ntombovuyo Veronica Mente-Nkuna, South Africa
21. Hon. Shally Josepha Raymond, Tanzania
22. Hon. Hawa Subira Mwaifunga, Tanzania
23. Hon. Mutinta Mazoka, Zambia
24. Hon. Princess Kasune Zambia
25. Hon. Paurina Mpariwa, Zimbabwe
26. Hon. Goodlucky Kwaramba, Zimbabwe
27. Hon. Tambudzani Mohadi, Zimbabwe

2.0 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Terms of Reference of the Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus are articulated in Article 16(5) of the SADC-PF Constitution and Rule 19 of the SADC PF Rules of Procedure.

3.0 NUMBER OF MEETINGS HELD, MEETING DATES AND THEME

The Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus (RWPC) convened a physical meeting on 11th May 2023, under the theme, "Leveraging the Social Media to Advance Women Political Participation in the SADC Region."

4.0 BACKGROUND

The media in general plays a very important role in disseminating information in society and can help to shape citizens' opinions, views and actions on any subject matter. In the past, politicians campaigned through newspapers, radios, direct mail and television. However, it goes without saying that limited or biased media reporting can affect the career prospects of women in politics if it continues unchecked. It is believed that social media can help level the playing field in politics, where money and access to formal communication channels pose huge barriers to new entrants, especially women.

Against this background, the SADC PF identified the need to train women parliamentarians in dealing with the media. It was envisaged that such training would help increase the visibility and widen the coverage of women politicians in the mainstream media and effectively deal with negative stereotypes and responses on social media.. In this regard, the RWPC convened under the theme, "Leveraging Social Media to Advance Women's Political Participation."

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the training were:

1. To build the capacity of female MPs to utilise social media and related ICT tools.
2. To understand the power of social media in advancing women's participation in politics in the SADC region.
3. To learn how to effectively use social media to increase visibility and influence.
4. To develop strategies, leveraging on social media, to engage with constituencies and promote gender equality.
5. To understand how to effectively formulate content that can engage with citizens.
6. To understand digital security.
7. To build knowledge on how to publish compelling stories on social media.

6.0 SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS BY THE SADC YOUTH FORUM (SAYOF)

The Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus (RWPC) received training from the two Resource Persons representing Southern African Youth Forum under the theme of the Committee Session, "Leveraging Social Media to Advance Women's Political Participation." The key issues raised in the presentations and ensuing deliberations are highlighted and presented below.

6.1 Understanding Social Media

The Caucus learned that social media refers to online platforms and websites that allow users to create and share content, participate in networking and engage in virtual communities. Members were exposed to various types of social media tools, namely, Twitter; Facebook; LinkedIn; Instagram; WhatsApp; YouTube; Snap Chat; Weibo; and TikTok, among others. A demonstration was done using one of the Members' Facebook Accounts and Members also had the opportunity to perform practical exercises on their respective Facebook accounts.

The Members were also exposed to the benefits of using social media for advocacy and communication. These included increased outreach and visibility; real-time engagement; cost-effectiveness; targeted messaging and amplifying women's voices by making it possible for women to share their experiences, opinions, initiatives and allowing their voices to be heard.

The session on the challenges of using social media for advocacy and communication alerted Members that although social media had introduced social networking sites that have benefits if used, candidates must be aware of the consequences if such sites are misused. The Members were informed that online harassment and abuse may discourage women's political participation. Members had the opportunity to share experiences relating to online abuse which mainly focused on their social status, especially on female politicians who were young, pregnant, single, married, divorced, have gained weight, and even dress code as well as those who stood up to speak against the limitations imposed by a patriarchal society.

The Members were encouraged to never give up their political vision and ambitions because of a small constituency bent on harassing them online. The Members of the Caucus encouraged each another to rise above these challenges and instead use them in their favour. There was a call for women parliamentarians to rise above the political divide and support one another to fight against online harassment and abuse. There was also a call for an African consolidated agenda to combat online violence against women in politics and others in general, emphasizing the need for digital gender equality. It was also

emphasized that women should be empowered to rise above the obstacles which tended to expose them to victimization in the digital space.

Fake news and misinformation were also presented as being among the challenges of using social media. Members were informed that fake news was usually generated by outlets masquerading as actual media sites but which in fact promulgated false or misleading accounts designed to deceive the public. It was noted that fake news and misinformation also had the potential to disrupt political campaigns and could amount to character assassination for an aspiring candidate. Thus, Members were strongly advised to check the authenticity of the source of the news or information, filter information, consistently check online information, and verify articles before sharing, as a safeguard against fake news.

Another challenge was that of the digital divide, whereby limited internet access and low digital literacy in certain regions may hinder the effective utilization of social media for advocacy. It was also noted that there was a digital gender divide where girls and women often had less access to technology and the internet compared to boys and men; and a generational digital divide where young people were more reliant on social media and more convinced of the benefits of life online compared to adults.

Members bemoaned that some social media platforms were either not easily accessible or not available to the rural population due to the absence of internet connectivity and electricity, while some constituents may not have the gadgets to use. These sentiments were also echoed by the citizens during the public hearings held by the Caucus in November, 2022. The citizens called for the existing social security systems in SADC member States to be adequately funded, and for an equitable allocation of resources so that the marginalized, which included women, could benefit from them.

6.2 Managing Social Media Accounts

The Members also learnt the importance of social media managers, who could come in handy to address challenges relating to the use of social media, particularly on misinformation, fake news, harassment and abuse. Some of the key roles of the social media managers could include online presence; strategic communication; real-time engagement; brand management; crisis management and opponent monitoring. Brand Management was singled out as one of the most important tasks of the social media managers as it could help to build name recognition and garner support from key constituencies for the aspiring candidate. It was further emphasized that personal branding was important because it could lead to new opportunities were one's skills and expertise would be on demand.

Crisis management was also highlighted as an important task of the social media managers because in times of crisis or sensitive situations, they could

play a critical role in managing communication effectively. They responded swiftly, provided accurate information, and addressed concerns to maintain transparency and trust. In terms of opponent monitoring, social media managers could help keep a close eye on the online activities of opponents, political rivals, and other relevant trends. They could do this by analysing competitor strategies, public sentiment, and emerging issues, allowing the political leader to stay informed and adapt their own messaging and approach accordingly. Members were advised to be cautious when choosing their social media managers and not allow too many people to manage their accounts.

6.3 Creating Engaging Content

The Members were exposed to different types of social media content and including texts; images; videos and infographics. Story telling was highlighted as one of the important methods of creating engaging social media content because it created emotional connection with the people; it captured attention and encouraged interaction; and it could humanize a cause and make it relatable. Members were also equipped with tips on how to create compelling social media content by knowing their audience through researching on their interests, needs and preferred platforms; maintaining a consistent tone, style and posting schedule, using high-quality visuals, clear fonts, and colours that were well aligned with candidate's branding; and included clear instructions to engage the audience and foster participation; respond to comments and messages, and encourage discussions.

Notwithstanding the challenges, social media was presented as a tool for social change as people could now easily call out wrong practices and injustices, and have a voice in different situations. They could instantly ask questions, receive answers, and reconnect with other people and others. Social media gave people the freedom to speak, and in some instances had become a catalyst in helping to potentially change the course of history. Examples of successful media campaigns included #FeesMustFall (South Africa): In 2015, South African students launched the #FeesMustFall movement on social media to protest against the high cost of education. The movement gained significant traction and led to a freeze on fee increases, increased government funding for higher education, and the introduction of free tertiary education for low-income students. Another example given was #BringBackOurGirls (Nigeria): In 2014, the terrorist group Boko Haram abducted 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, Nigeria. The #BringBackOurGirls campaign gained international attention and support, driven by social media activism. The movement prompted governments, organizations, and individuals to act, resulting in increased efforts to locate and rescue the kidnapped girls.

Members were given the opportunity to share stories from their communities that could be used to inspire women's participation in politics. Many shared stories that related to the role they played in uplifting the livelihoods of fellow

women through business initiatives and also how they successfully manoeuvred the political terrain in spite of numerous obstacles.

6.4 Crafting A Social Media Strategy

The Members were informed that having a social media strategy was important as it provided women political leaders with a plan to engage with their followers and reach a broader audience. It also helped in defining the target audience, setting goals, choosing the right platform, digital laws, developing content, monitoring and measuring performance. Some of the popular platforms that could be used to target different demographics included Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. A social media strategy had the potential to enable women political leaders to establish themselves as thought leaders, build a brand, and gain a competitive edge.

6.5 Digital Security

This was defined as a holistic term used to describe resources to protect one's online identity and protect data and other digital assets. Members were warned that without digital security, they were dangerously exposed, similar to a soldier without ammunition in a battlefield. Tools for digital security included the hardware (computers and phones), antiviruses, webservices e.g Google+2, biometrics e.g finger prints and face, firewalls, among others. Members were advised to check the authenticity of the service providers of digital security tools before using them and to change passwords every 3 months as well as using different passwords for different accounts to safeguard their digital accounts. The session also provided Members with the opportunity for practical exercises on their mobile phones.

7.0 OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from its training on the use of social media to advance women's political participation in the SADC region and pursuant to its deliberations, the SADC PF Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus:

Concerned that although social media has grown to be a powerful tool to engage with communities, some sections of the population, especially women and youths, did not have access to it because they did not have the necessary gadgets as these were unaffordable to the average citizen;

Further concerned that there was limited access to social media platforms due to the unavailability or unreliability of electrical energy and lack of internet connectivity infrastructure in some regions, especially the rural areas;

Cognisant of the need for the mobile service providers to consider reviewing airtime and data tariffs to affordable levels;

Aware that about 11 SADC Member States were due to hold elections between 2023 and 2024;

Disturbed by the growing incidences of online harassment and abuse with women mostly being victims, especially those aspiring for political posts.

NOW, THEREFORE the RWPC recommends to the 53rd Plenary Assembly to:

- i. **Urge** SADC Member Parliaments to lobby their governments to grant tax rebates or subsidies in importation of digital gadgets to ease access of these devices by women and youth;
- ii. **Prompt** SADC Member Parliaments to streamline parliamentary programmes to allow for ICT inclusiveness and an enhanced engagement by women MPs, especially on fast-evolving issues such as social media ;
- iii. **Reaffirm** its commitment to close the digital gender divide existing in Southern Africa by enabling programmes at SADC-PF level which aim to sensitise MPs, especially women MPs, to be ICT literate and to promote participatory democracy by engaging citizens through online means;
- iv. **Encourage** SADC Member Parliaments to diligently perform their oversight role in the quest to ensure that their governments provide reliable electrical energy and internet connectivity infrastructure, especially in the rural areas, in order to bring social media digital platforms closer to the rural populations.
- v. **Call upon** SADC Member Parliaments to encourage their governments to lobby the mobile service providers to ensure that the airtime and data tariffs are affordable to the generality of the citizens.
- vi. **Urge** SADC Parliaments to enact necessary cybersecurity legislation to protect users from falling victim of online fraud and online gender-based violence, especially women and girls who may be less technologically savvy due to the digital gender divide.
- vii. **Urge** SADC PF to strengthen its response mechanism to gender based violence, including online violence, in each Member State holding elections in 2023 and 2024 and beyond, through the Forum's Election Observation Missions. This should be substantiated by documentation of both physical and online gender-based violence.
- viii. **Call upon** SADC Member States to promote ICT literacy and education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels without discrimination to both male and female individuals in order to provide them with equal opportunities in life whilst leveraging on ICT resources;
- ix. **Direct** the SADC PF Secretariat to organise further training, especially on managing social media content.

8.0 CONCLUSION

Desirous to see the rise of women in politics and building the momentum to encourage women political participation in the SADC region, SADC PF aims at creating a level playing field for both women and men. The Forum has been pursuing and exploring avenues that would create a safe space for and inspire women to participate in the political sphere. In order to continuously empower women, the appropriate ICT strategies need to be put in place by SADC Member States. Such strategies would render ICT available, accessible and affordable to women at par with men. The RWPC will continue supporting SADC national Parliaments to consolidate their legal and policy frameworks to close the digital gender divide in Southern Africa.

Hon. Regina ESPARON
CHAIRPERSON

Edna MAFURUSE
COMMITTEE SECRETARY

9.0 APPENDICES

APPENDIX I – LIST OF OFFICIALS

Ms. Boemo Sekgoma, Secretary General
Ms. Yapoka Mungandi, Director - Finance and Corporate Services
Ms. Clare Musonda, Director – Corporate Governance
Mr. Sheuneni Kurasha, Programme Manager – DGHR
Mr. Ronald Windwaai, Webmaster
Ms Paulina Kanguatjivi, Assistant Procedural officer and Coordinator
Mrs. Edna Mafuruse, Committee Secretary – RWPC
Mr. Cleopas Gwakwara, Committee Secretary – TIFI
Mr. Munashe Tofa, Committee Secretary – HSDSP
Ms. Ifoma Mulewa, Committee Secretary – GEYWARD
Ms. Gomezgani Ngwira, Committee Secretary – FANR
Ms. Mammehela Matamane, Committee Secretary

APPENDIX II – RESOURCES PERSONS

Mr. Misheck Gondo- SADC Youth Forum
Mr. Mwila Chrissedy Bwanga-SADC Youth Forum

APPENDIX III - OBSERVER

HE Ambassador Nyaradzai Gumbonzvanda- Former African Union Goodwill for the Campaign to end Child Marriage