

“Empowered Women Without Power” in Mozambique: How a Relatively High Percentage of Women in Parliament Does not Mean More Women-friendly Policies

*“Mulheres Empoderadas Sem Poder” em Moçambique:
Como uma Percentagem Relativamente Elevada
de Mulheres no Parlamento não Significa Políticas
Mais Favoráveis às Mulheres*

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Abstract

Although in the twentieth-century women gained more rights, we still far from reaching an egalitarian world where humans are treated equally and have the same opportunities, regardless of their gender. Many African countries have high rates of women in parliament, despite low socio-economic development and deep-rooted patriarchal structures. Based on the case of Mozambique, in this article, we question: does increased female representation in parliament mean more women-friendly policies? Claiming that, where there are no feminist parties, higher rates of women in parliament is due to gender quotas, therefore it will not mean more women-friendly policies. Employing a qualitative methodology consisting of literature review and empirical observation, we confirmed that although women have a considerable high presence in the parliament, they are in a relatively low numerical expression in the main decision-making circles inside the parliament. Similarly, female MPs behave in individualistic behaviour to increase their prospect re-election.

Keywords: empowerment, gender, gender-quotas, parliament, Mozambique.

Resumo

Embora no século xx as mulheres tenham conquistado mais direitos, ainda estamos longe de alcançar um mundo igualitário onde os seres humanos sejam tratados de forma igual

e tenham as mesmas oportunidades, independentemente do seu género. Muitos países africanos têm taxas elevadas de mulheres no parlamento, apesar do baixo desenvolvimento socioeconómico e das estruturas patriarcais profundamente enraizadas. Com base no caso de Moçambique, neste artigo, questionamos: será que o aumento da representação feminina no parlamento significa políticas mais favoráveis às mulheres? Afirmando que, onde não existem partidos feministas, o aumento da taxa de mulheres no parlamento deve-se às quotas de género, logo não significará políticas mais amigas das mulheres. Recorrendo a uma metodologia qualitativa que consiste na revisão da literatura e na observação empírica, confirmámos que, embora as mulheres tenham uma presença elevada e considerável no parlamento, têm uma expressão numérica relativamente baixa nos principais círculos de decisão dentro do parlamento. Do mesmo modo, as deputadas adotam um comportamento individualista para aumentar as suas perspetivas de reeleição.

Palavras-chave: empoderamento, género, quotas de género, parlamento, Moçambique.

Introduction

Women have been underrepresented in politics and remained in domestic affairs for centuries. In the twentieth century, especially in the second half, women gained more rights and space to participate in politics, still, they are "majority" that is underrepresented in the decision-making process. After the Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995) World Conferences on Women^[1], several directives were brought to change the course of actions and promoting and empowering women, give them a voice in the process of leadership and decision-making (Raimundo, 2005), however, the path to end uneven representation of women in politics is still long and much still needs to be done.

In this sense, many countries have made progress toward gender parity to the point that in the twenty-first century in many countries it is common to see more and more women in prominent decision-making positions at all levels, from the presidency, governments, parliament to local governments. Concerning parliament, the instance where many decisions are made, African countries have the highest percentage of women in parliament in the world. For instance, according to recent^[2] data from the International Parliament Union^[3], Rwanda is the country with the highest rate of women representation in parliament in the world, with 63.8% of the 80 seats in the Lower House were held by women. Moreover, four African countries (Rwanda, Namibia, Senegal, and South Africa) are among the Top 20 countries with the highest rates of women in parliament.

Although women's political participation and representation is often associated

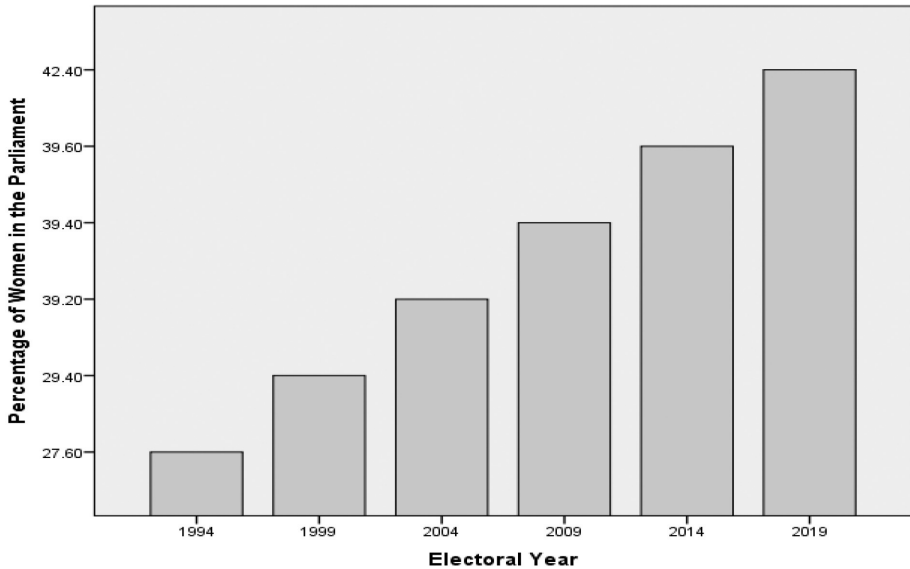
1. These Conference were important steps in raising international awareness for women's right and advancing gender equality globally.

2. Ranking as of 1st November 2024.

3. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=10&year=2020>.

with human development (Bitar et al., 2024), it is intriguing that while Scandinavia and other countries with high rates of female representation also have a high level of economic development and quality of life, African countries have the same outcome under a low level of socio-economic development, low-level in the human development index, and deep-rooted patriarchal structures (Raimundo, 2005; Obasanjo, 2019). Thus, it will be interesting to see the condition that favours ‘representation’ of women and what power they have as “power holders”, and what they do to promote gender equity. Therefore, one can ask questions such as: is the representation of women in African parliaments substantive? Is it a merely symbolic representation?

Concerning Mozambique, despite lacking effective representation of women in politics, it has seen significant advances in women’s representation in politics and especially in parliament. Although since the independence in 1975 women had the right to vote and be voted and participate in the single-party parliament, it was after the founding democratic elections in 1994 that the country has been among the countries with high rates of women in parliament across Africa and the World. The following chart shows the shares of women and men in the Assembly of Republic from 1994 to the 2019 legislature:



Source: Elaborated by the authors based on data from IPU (data.ipu.org) and Raimundo (2005).

Yet lately, the Mozambican parliament has seen increased female leadership. Indeed, in the parliament that came out of the 2009 elections, the first Speaker of the legislature was a woman (Verónica Nataniel Macamo Dlovo), not to mention the fact that two of the three heads of the parliamentary benches were women (Margarida Adamugy Talapa, for the Frelimo party, and Maria Ivone Bernardo

Rensamo Soares, for the Renamo party). Moreover, the parliament elected in the 2019 elections) had a woman as the first Speaker (Esperanca Laurinda Francisco Nhiumane Esperanca Bias), not to mention that the youngest member of parliament (MP) is a woman (Mércia Viriato Lica, 23 years old).

Although this quantitative progress is still an achievement, there are still many pertinent questions concerning women's representation in Mozambique. Some authors (e.g. Raimundo, 2005) question the effectiveness of this representation and if it works toward the wide interests of women or is just a symbolic representation.

Based on the case of Mozambican Parliament, this research question: *does increased female representation in parliament mean more women-friendly policies?* To the question, we claim that *a high percentage of women in parliament does not automatically mean more women-friendly policies*. There are no parties whose programmatic agendas and electoral platforms explicitly support women's rights and gender equality in Mozambique. Although one or another party may mention women empowerment, observation of the main parties^[4] shows that women elected to the parliament are most of the times, women with little schooling who see gender equality as undesirable for Mozambican society, some publicly attack^[5] other women who are perceived to be feminists. The higher percentage of women in parliament is due to the fact that national elections use a proportional representation system with closed party lists, and the major parties running for legislature have voluntary quotas for women. However, once in parliament—and since there is a strong party discipline—they cannot go against their party, even if it is to represent women's interest. This article discusses women and politics; discusses gender quotas, and the last section will address the power of the female MP in Mozambique.

Methodology

This article is based on mixed-methods covering qualitative and numeric data women and politics in Mozambique. In this sense, we reviewed the legal status related to gender empowerment as well as the current literature on gender, with a special focus on our case study. Moreover, we reinforced the literature review with the empirical observation of the female representation of women in politics and human rights in Mozambique. For data collection, we relied on secondary (archival) sources, mainly based on official data found on the official websites of *Parlamento MZ* and the *International Parliament Union*. Due to bureaucratic impediments, we were unable to access complete data (age, education, etc.) about the deputies in the Assembly of the Republic and we could not undertake fieldwork (mainly interviews) which could have been of an added value to our analysis.

4. Frelimo, Renamo, and MDM.

5. Available at: <https://www.cmjornal.pt/mundo/detalhe/ativista-apresenta-queixa-contra-deputada-mocambicana-que-pediu-a-sua-violacao>

Women and politics: incentives and constraints in the pathway to power.

With the profound changes in traditional sex roles in the twentieth century, the issues of women in politics have received considerable attention in social sciences. Scholars (Beckwith & Cowell, 2007; Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019) often question what condition favours or hinders women from accessing formal political space and, once in political offices, under what conditions they can substantively represent female interests. This is because women empowerment in "politics is a broader project than winning a seat in a legislature" (Tadros, 2014, p. 1), therefore, it "is not when there are more women in the legislature that people's perception change, but when they pursue agendas that make difference that they elicit a positive role model effect" (Ibid, p. 4). Thus, increase the number of women in parliament is just the first step of a long process to end the unevenness of opportunities between men and women.

While in *ancient* Rome women had indirect influence in politics and "acting behind the scene", as it was 'supposed that it was only through men that women could exert any influence in the public sector, whether, by counsel, cajolment, manipulation or promise' (Bauman, 2003, p. 2), in the modern era women are acting directly in politics. However, despite visible progress in women's rights, the world is still characterized by the lack of parity between men and women. Indeed, in many societies, women face big gender gaps in the division of household responsibilities, limited access to education opportunities and economic resources as well as legal and political barriers to positions of political power (Inglehart and Norris, 2003, p. 4). In this sense, we ask what conditions favour women's participation in politics.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, it was argued that the most effective way to foster women's political participation was through economic development as it improves the living conditions and the status of women (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). The argument is that "expansion of health care and adequate nutrition, schools and housing, jobs and basic social protection, increasing the middle class and laying the foundation for the consolidation of democratic institutions" would "lift all boats", including problems of women in the political systems (Ibid, pp. 4–5). Thus, in order to achieve more and substantive participation of women in politics, there was a need to develop and modernize societies. In this sense, countries with a high index of human development and a high level of economic development (per capita GDP) would, as a consequence, have a high probability of women participating in politics. For instance, Nordic countries with a high quality of life also have a high number of women in politics. However, some economically developed countries such as Bahrain and Kuwait that only started having women's representation in the beginning of 21st century, while there are many sub-Saharan countries (e.g. Mozambique, Namibia, and Rwanda) with a low level of economic development but high rates of women in politics. In one way or another, the modernization paradigm was challenged by facts and reality.

The gaps in modernization theory made it clear that economic development was not enough and the only way to empower women. As Inglehart and Norris (2003) put out, in the 1980s and the 1990s, the shift was to remove legal barriers to women's progress, believing that independent and empowered women are part of the development process, and only in such conditions that women can articulate their own issue, wants, needs and feelings. In this sense, the United Nations has encouraged states to recognize women's rights and the importance of equal participation of women and men in a field in the society (CEDAW, article 1^[6]), including politics. As result, many countries have signed international conventions and implemented legal reforms supporting equal opportunities and political representation, leading to women gaining more space in politics across the world. This is to say that while economic development can lead to an organic transformation of the society as a whole, "changing the 'rules of the gam' can have a dramatic impact on women's lives, accelerating progress and opening new opportunities" (Inglehart and Norris, 2003, p. 7).

Gender parity around the world continues to be far from ideal. While today women in many countries cast ballots in equal (or even greater) number than men, women continue to lag behind men as party members and campaign activists, as candidates running for legislative office, as elected members and leaders of local councils, as members of the judiciary and top civil service, and as cabinet ministers and as heads of government and state (OSCE 2014, p. 12). In this sense, it is important to look into the constraints faced by women in their pathway to power and for actively engaging in politics.

Some conditions which can prevent women from actively engaging in politics can be found in culture. Inglehart and Norris (2003) have argued that *culture matters* a lot in shaping societal and political outcomes. Therefore, how a given societal formation perceives the gender division of roles in the home and family, paid employment and political arena is determined by the predominant culture, in forms of social norms, beliefs, and values. How gender^[7] is perceived in society will impact the likelihood of women entering politics. This is because rigid gender roles and power distributions across different genders determines the rights, resources, and power of women and men. Thus, if women have representation and are allowed to have good performance in senior positions in society, it is most likely that more women will be influenced to participate in politics. For instance, where a culture of gender equality predominates *de jure* legal rights are more likely to be translated into *de facto* rights allowing a woman to gain the confidence to

6. The Article 1 of CEDAW defines discrimination against women as: "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field".

7. According to Inglehart and Norris (2003:8) "Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and learned behaviour of women and men associated with the biological characteristics of females and males".

venture into politics, in other words, more women in politics can have a long-term positive impact of inspiring more women to enter politics (Beckwith, 2007). However, in other contexts, women are not only limited by society in terms of the opportunities they seek but also choose to limit themselves (Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Kellow, 2010). Indeed, traditional and patriarchal hierarchy makes women lack self-confidence and self-belief to aspire to leadership positions and effectively block women from seeking effective involvement in the decision-making process and "this is reinforced by women's fear of rejection or even violence from husband and family if they strive to enter politics" (Kellow, 2010, p.19).

Gender quotas: breaking the ‘glass ceiling’ limiting women’s political participation?

Gender quotas are one of the 20th century’s great achievements in the struggle for gender equality and equity, as before them women were eligible to serve, but they were ‘denied’ to enter in politics. After the United Nations and Women Movement’s efforts to increase female participation in politics, over a hundred countries adopted gender quota policies either in electoral laws or in constitutions (Burnet, 2011; Jabeen and Awan, 2017). But what exactly are gender quotas, and how do they influence the proportion and representation of women in politics?

Quotas are a form of affirmative action or equal opportunity measure designed to address the slow pace of change in the participation of women and minority groups in areas of society where they are historically under-represented, including employment, education and in political institutions (McCann, 2013). Through quotas, certain number or percentage of places are set to be occupied by the under-represented groups such as women. Thus, gender quota refers to a system that aims to recruit women into instances of political power, ensuring that at least a considerable percentage (30% to 40%) of them are represented political posts (Dahlerup, 2002; McCann, 2013). The gender quotas are assumed to be a temporary measure until all barriers for women to entry politics are removed. Nevertheless, quotas may also be gender neutral to ensure that both genders are not underrepresented and may require "that men, as well as women, should constitute 40 per cent of the members of a committee, or that neither gender should occupy more than 60 per cent and no less than 40 per cent of the seats" (Dahlerup, 2002, p. 1).

The adoption of quotas can either be statutorily through constitutions or electoral legislation or voluntarily through political parties. As McCann (2013, pp. 7–8) puts in, there are three sorts of gender quotas used across the world, namely: *reserved seats*, *legislative candidate quotas*, and *voluntary party quotas*. The *reserved seats* are legal quotas mandated in a country’s constitution that set aside a certain number or percentage of parliamentary seats to women that other groups are ineligible to contest, they can be through elections or appointment

based on a prescribed formula. The *legislative candidate quotas* are a legal obligation that requires political parties to nominate or preselect a certain proportion of women as candidates for election. However, this does not assure that women will be represented in the parliament as they can be placed in ineligible positions (in countries using a proportional representation system with a closed party list). Thus, for them to be effective there is an additional need for political or financial incentive coercing political parties to place female candidates in eligible positions or to adopt *zipper quotas* where men and women alternate on the party list. The *voluntary party quotas* do not possess a legal status as some political parties, compromised with gender equity and women empowerment, may voluntarily require (through recommendation or mandatory rules) that a certain proportion of candidates nominated to represent the party in an election is comprised by women. In Mozambique, neither the constitution reserve fixed seats for women nor the electoral law demand political parties to comply with gender equity in legislative elections, yet, they voluntarily comply with this measure.

The adoption of either statutory or intra-party gender quotas has a direct and immediate impact on women's representation, and impacts the organic transformation of the society. The immediate effect of adopting gender quotas policies is on the descriptive representation of women, referring to the proportion of women present regardless of their real power and their ability to shape policies and behaviours of the public mass (Tadros, 2014, p. 1). Since gender quotas are a temporary mechanism to break the 'glass ceiling' limiting women political participation and increase their presence in instances of decision making, in long term, they might also contribute to transforming the political structure affecting beliefs about acceptability and legitimacy of women as political actors. The more the society sees women in top political leadership positions, the more the society is willing to accept that women can be politicians, and women themselves believe that they can help in the progress of society in any field, including politics. In this sense, "as well as shifting the norms concerning women in political leadership, quotas may also incentivize women to jointly promote each other's (re-)election to top positions" (O'Brien and Rickne, 2016, p. 114). Therefore, the pathway toward gender equality has to be shaped in the informal and formal institutions, in a way that, on one hand, girls and boys learn to see women in top leadership positions for them to believe that a woman is not inferior to man.

Gender parity in politics: an unattainable ideal?

After noticing the paucity of women in political institutions, in the 1990s women's movements across the world started advocating for gender parity. Gender parity is defined as equal presence of women and men in governing bodies. It can also be understood as the sharing of political power between women and men in governing bodies (Praud, 2012). UN Agencies and human right groups advocated

for gender parity arguing that a quota of 25%-40% is not enough to ensure equal presence of women and men in decision-making bodies. Therefore, both genders should have a share of 50% each in governing bodies. Thus, gender parity measures help bridge the gap by promoting equal representation of women and men in positions of power.

It seems that more has to be done to ensure that this aimed ideal is attained. As Schwab *et al.* (2019, p. 10) note:

political empowerment^[8] is the area where women are severely under-represented, [and] the fact that [by 2020] only a handful of countries have closed at least 50% of their Political Empowerment gaps demonstrates how, globally, women’s presence and participation in politics is still extremely limited.

For instance, while many countries are increasing the number of women in parliament as well as in ministries, still there are countries^[9] with no single women as a minister at all. Hence, if countries such as Iceland, Finland, Nicaragua, Norway, are closer to gender parity, many others are either working to ensure descriptive representation or are still yet to start the journey towards this ideal.

The power of the ‘empowered’ women in mozambique

The mere presence of women does not mean that they will be "powerful" in the parliament to determine women-friendly policies or even policies in general. This is because in parliament there are inner circles of power, working commissions, parliamentary benches, thus, some MP are heading those commissions and parliamentary benches while others are just ‘simple members’ of the parliament with normal rights and duties of the parliamentarians. Regardless of gender, being in the inner circle or heading a parliamentary bench gives considerable power to suggest policies and monitor the implementation of them. Likewise, heading or just taking part in a working commission also gives one the power to propose policies, monitor the governmental action, and even call the government to the parliament demanding a response to government action or inaction in that area.

Are female MPs present in those circles of power in the Mozambican parliament? At what proportion, compared to their male counterparts. Is the high presence of women in parliament, in general, reflected in the circles of power? To these questions, we will delve deeper into data concerning members of the Standing Commission of the Assembly of the Republic (1977–2020) and the seven working commissions of the current (ix) legislature.

8. Bold in the original.

9. “Azerbaijan, Belize, Brunei Darussalam, Iraq, Lithuania, Saudi Arabia, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and Thailand” (Schwab *et al.*, 2019, p. 10).

Table 1: Men and Women in the Standing Commission of the Assembly of the Republic.

LEGISLATURE	MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL
I & II (1977)	15 (100%)	0 (0%)	15 (100%)
III (1987)	20 (95.24%)	1 (4.76%)	21 (100%)
IV (1994)	9 (90%)	1 (10%)	10 (100%)
V (2000)	12 (85.71)	2 (14.28%)	14 (100%)
VI (2005)	8 (66.66%)	4 (33.33%)	12 (100%)
VII (2010)	7 (63.63%)	4 (36.36%)	11 (100%)
VIII (2015)	11 (64.70%)	6 (35.29%)	17 (100%)
IX (2020)	11 (64.70%)	6 (35.29%)	17 (100%)

Source: AR (2021).

As can be seen from the table, women have gained considerable space in the parliament, including in the standing commission. Before democratization, from 1975 to 1994, only one woman^[10] out of 21 total parliamentarians was in the standing commission of the People's Assembly, not to mention that in the first and second legislatures all fifteen members of the standing commission were men. However, after democratization in 1994, as much as women were increasing in the parliament they were also 'invading' space which was mostly occupied by men. Indeed, the proportion of women in the permanent commission went from 10% in 1994 to 35.29% in 2015 and 2020. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the standing commission is headed by the first spiker of the parliament, thus, in the VIII and IX legislatures, the permanent commission is being headed by a woman.

Once an MP is in the permanent commission means s/he has considerably more power than the rest of parliamentarians. This is because "the standing commission is the body of the Assembly of the Republic that coordinates the activities of the Assembly in plenary sitting and of its commissions and national parliamentary groups" and has among other attributions, the power to "establish commissions of inquiry of an urgent nature, during intermissions between plenary sessions of the Assembly of the Republic" (Articles 193, 195, CRM, 2004). Thus, if those 6 women in the permanent commission were feminist or, at least, following a feminist-oriented agenda it was to expect more women-friendly policies in this current legislature. However, that is not the case, they^[11] tend to be more loyal militants of the ruling and opposition parties, without a clear strategy to pursue a feminist agenda women .

10. Graca Machel, the widow of the late President Samora Machel and also the only female minister until 1994. For details on Gender Representatives in Decision-Making before democratization (Raimundo, 2005).

11. Available at: <https://www.parlamento.mz/index.php/pt/orgaos/comissao-permanente/lista-actual-dos-membros>

Another instance of power in the parliament are working commissions. According to Assembly of Republic (2021), working commissions are organs of the Assembly of Republic which have among many functions: discuss and vote proposals, present proposals, conduct inquiries, hold public hearings with civil society entities, receive petitions and citizens’ complaint against an act or omission of a public authority or entity, and to monitor and exercise the supervision of the executive branch’s activities. Therefore, any issue, related or not to gender, generally, has to be started in the working commission for it to reach the plenary. Similarly, monitoring and supervising the actions of the government is also left to the working commissions of the Assembly of Republic. Thus, in one way or another, heading or being a member of a working commission in the parliament confers an increased power to change the course of action either by proposing policies or by monitoring the implementation of governmental actions. In the Mozambican parliament, there are nine working commissions which may be constituted by a minimum of five and a maximum of seventeen deputies, elected for the duration of the legislature, in compliance with the principle of parliamentary representativeness (RAR^[12], Article 68). How is the presence of women in these commissions? How many commissions are led by women? The following table summarises the data on women in working commissions in the IX legislature of the Parliament in Mozambique:

Table 2: Men and Women heading a working commission of the Assembly of the Republic.

No	Working Commission on:	Man Heading	Woman Heading
1 st	Constitutional Affairs, Human Rights and Legality	X	
2 nd	Plan and budget	X	
3 rd	<i>Social Affairs, Gender, Technologies and Media</i>		X
4 th	Public Administration and Local Government	X	
5 th	Agriculture, Economy, and Environment	X	
6 th	Defence, Security, and Public Order	X	
7 th	International Relations, Cooperation, and Communities		X
8 th	Petitions and Complaints	X	
9 th	Parliamentary Ethics		X

Source: AR (2021).

12. Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of the Republic Law No. 17–2013, of 18 July.

The table illustrates interesting points on the real power of women in the parliament which cannot be seen if one just focuses on the descriptive features. It can be seen that whereas more than 42% of the 250 deputies of the Assembly of the Republic are women, only 33.33% of them are heads of a working commission. However, it is quite an achievement for women, with some certainty, the fact that in the 3rd commission responsible for the gender that 11 (64.70%) out of the 17 members are women. Furthermore, it is also interesting to note that in this commission there is gender parity and balance in the four positions of authority as follow: President (woman), Vice-President (man), Rapporteur (woman), Vice-Rapporteur (man), a procedure that, if followed in other commission, would increase the power and importance of women in the Parliament (AR, 2021).

We need more than the mere presence of women in the parliament to have more women-friendly policies. While mechanisms are being adopted to increase the presence of women in parliament, it must be ensured that we have competent women (and men) who in fact represent and defend the specific interests of women, since they make up half of the citizenry. Despite a relatively high percentage of women in parliament, particularly within the Social Affairs, Gender, Technologies, and Media Commission, progress remains limited. While some legislation has been approved, such as the Law to Prevent and Combat Premature Unions and the Law Against Domestic Violence, enforcement remains weak. Key issues like violence against women, early and forced marriages, sexual harassment in schools, and domestic and sexual violence persist^[13] as defining challenges in Mozambican society.

If approached as rational actors, it is reasonable to expect that women members of parliament would consider the potential risks that more radical policies or proposals might pose to their political careers. As politicians tend to adapt their behaviour in the parliament to the incentive of different electoral systems to increase their re-election probability (Carey and Shugart 1995 *apud* Hoffmann 2020, 387), female legislators will be more likely to represent women if that does not jeopardize their chance of being re-elected. In Mozambique, the political recruitment is mostly top-down as political parties' leaderships are the ones monitoring the process of candidate's placement in the party list for the legislative elections. Thus, it is almost unlikely for those who are openly feminist to be placed in an eligible position during electoral candidacy. Therefore, as rational actors motivated by the intention to advance their personal goals and careers, female MPs prioritize re-election as their primary objective. They will take (or refrain from taking) any actions they consider necessary to achieve that goal. Yet, "although all female MPs might have the intrinsic motivation to act for women's

13. According to Forum Mulher, six out of ten women are victims of domestic violence in Mozambique, not just in the rural areas, even in urban ones. Yet, violence against women is not limited to less educated or low-income people, as even two daughters of former presidents, Valentina Guebuza and Josina Machel, were the target of domestic violence.

concerns, they will represent these issues more strongly in the legislature arena if it does not compromise their individual re-election prospects” (Hoffmann, 2020, p. 836). As in the case of Liberia where women prioritized party agendas even when it was against women’s interests, in Mozambique too, “women are demonstrating a more individualistic nature and acting more along party lines than in concert with each other, there is lack women solidarity” (Kellow, 2010), so there is need of institutional incentives for female MPs to be solidary with other women.

In a context of a weak legislative such as in Mozambique, the responsibility of making policies is shifted to the executive branch of the government. The *Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Service* carries the responsibility of both drawing and enforcing policies, and only appealing to parliament for policy legitimation. Thus, as the ruling party also has a majority in the parliament and the recruitment to government also happens among the elected MPs, the legislature serves as an extension of executive power where many policies are easily legitimated.

The females in parliament are not the only ones responsible for proposing women-friendly policies. Therefore, men also have a responsibility in parliament’s weakness in representing women’s interests. This is because gender equality is an agenda of society as a whole and, as such, it includes men in parliament. However, in an already weak parliament in policymaking, which ‘just’ legitimates something that was already designed by the council of ministers and very few times suggest any alteration (Pereira, 2008), it would be unfair to only ‘blame’ the women in the parliament for the insufficiency of women-friendly policies. Thus, as long as ineffectiveness continues characterizing the Mozambican parliament and parliamentarians see the legislature as a stairway to escape from poverty and increase their social status; policies that have come out from parliament will be far from the expectations of citizens and will reflect this incompetence, either in gender-related matters or in other social problems.

Not even the functions of check and balances, policy monitoring, and evaluation, in the matter of gender, is effectively performed by the parliament. When a violation of women rights reaches the public sphere, it is first the civil society organizations that request quick action of the justice and the executive in the accountability of the perpetrators. For instance, in the *scandal of Matalane*, where instructors impregnated 15 students, the Ministry of Interior sued the instructors after coordinated action by civil society organizations such as *Forum Mulher* and *WLSA* and not after the action of the legislative.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the substantive power of female members of parliaments in Africa in representing other women. Based on the case of Mozambique, the research questioned whether increased female representation

in parliament means more women-friendly policies, claiming that, when there are no feminist-oriented parties, even when that are high rates of women in parliament due to gender quotas, policy-making processes may not necessarily mean more women-friendly policies.

The empirical observation of the case of Mozambique confirmed that although women have a considerable high presence in the parliament, they are in a relatively low numerical expression in the main decision-making circles inside the parliament. Similarly, female MPs adopt individualistic behaviour to increase their prospect of re-election. This research innovates by not limiting the analysis to the numerical description of the deputies in the parliament, likewise, their presence in the circles of power and positions of leadership within the parliament were also considered. Nevertheless, further research should provide more comprehensive insights, including the profile of female members of parliament and indicators such as age and education level, as well as look at their kinship with male politicians.

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