



Meeting Summary

Building Inclusive Democracy: Gender and Political Decision-making in Tanzania

Hon Anna Margareth Abdalla MP

Chairperson of the Tanzania Women Parliamentary Group (TWPG)

A Delegation of TWPG Representatives

Chair: Bob Dewar CMG

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24 January 2012

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Anna Margareth Abdalla:

The MPs of the Tanzanian Women Parliamentary Group (TWPG) represent six political parties and have political experience ranging from newly elected MPs to those who have served several terms. The group provides training to women, enabling them to give better performances in parliament and hold greater credibility as politicians. This is to counter the traditional view of Tanzanian women 'belonging in the kitchen'.

Political parties were reluctant to field female candidates in the past because of a perception that they were more likely to lose elections. In response, women began a campaign to support fellow women in politics. Female politicians acted as a pressure group; promoting women's rights in politics as well as more generally. They formed a cross-party platform – the TWPG – providing a united front on issues involving women, family and children. The TWPG believe that development must be inclusive of women for it to be effective and their motto is 'a woman's friend is a woman'.

Out of 120 seats in parliament 30 'Special Seats' are held by women. The key mechanism for improving women's representation has been through the constitution. This was changed to include a 10% quota of female MPs, and subsequently increased to 30%. We are campaigning for this to be increased again to 50%. The way Tanzania's first-past-the-post electoral system works is biased against female candidates, and the TWPG strongly supports changing to a system of proportional representation. This would more fairly represent women in politics.

Women face frequent discrimination when running for elections, for example, one female candidate was recently criticised for wearing lipstick. There is a general attitude that women's 'Special Seats' are easier to win. One of the current problems is that the law does not ensure that all parties have a system for promoting women. The TWPG try to encourage women who have served at least two terms to be promoted within their parties. It is important to note that many male MPs are also very supportive of the TWPG's aims.

Question & Answer Session

Q. Do many young women in Tanzania hold aspirations of becoming involved in politics?

A. In urban areas enthusiasm for getting involved in politics is stronger. But young women also have many different aspirations for a better life (through pursuing other careers). Politicians are generally much younger than they used to be – around 30 years old or younger – and this is changing the image of politics. The TWPG recognise that it is up to them to inspire young women, and they have specific policies for getting young women more involved in their parties.

Q. With the increasing number of younger people in parliament, has there been a change in ideology, or increased convergence in ideas with the 'old guard'?

A. Hon Anna Margareth Abdalla MP explained that she entered parliament in 1975, and since then it has changed completely and become much more inspiring. Debate is more extensive, and policy and legislation is more strongly challenged and critiqued by MPs. On the other hand, there has also been an increase in 'activist' politicians representing particular agendas, which can distort debate.

Q. It is encouraging to see an increase in the number of female MPs in Tanzania and more generally across Africa. Does support for the emancipation of marginalised groups also extend to rights for homosexuals in Tanzania?

A. This is a taboo subject in Tanzania and isn't discussed in everyday conversation. It is also illegal, so it is not debated. There is no movement on this issue yet.

A. Hon Anna Margareth Abdalla MP highlighted that Tanzania is only 50 years old since independence, whereas the UK took 300 years to reach its current state it will take time for Tanzania on some issues, but neither should they be prescribed to.

A. It is known that homosexuality takes place, but people don't want to discuss it. As with witchcraft, people know that it happens, but discussing it can encourage such activities. For these reasons MPs discourage reporting

on this subject in the press. In any case, Tanzania has far more pressing issues on the agenda, such as poverty, disease, and employment.

Q. What is being done to encourage the participation of women in business?

A. This is quite a new subject. Women have traditionally been involved in 'petty trade' (growing their own food and selling it) but not much more. This is starting to change and the TWPG are encouraging it. Giving legal titles for land and property are important steps as these can be used as certificates of creditworthiness for getting access to investment loans. Assistance is provided to women who own small and medium sized businesses. The attitude of young graduates is also changing; it used to be that university would lead to employment in the government, but increasingly now graduates are seeking to become self-employed. For this to be successful education needs to be reoriented to give people the skills needed to set up businesses. A loan system was set up to encourage small private enterprises to replace government services, but the scheme saw little success as people lacked the skills to set up their own businesses. A key lesson of this is that credit loans are no use without appropriate training.

A. Women need money to run for elections, to cover transport costs and other things. In contrast to politics in the UK, individual candidates run on their own in Tanzania without support from their party. They only receive party support once they've been successfully elected.

Q. Where are the structural disadvantages against women found – does it start in primary school, secondary school, university, or in job training? What is happening in practice to promote equality?

A. There is a 50/50 gender quota in place for both primary and secondary schools and also with university entry. A problem with mixed secondary schools though was that girls were getting pregnant and having to leave school. Girl-only boarding schools have been suggested as a solution. Generally women weren't always performing as well as men, but universities introduced courses specifically to coach women in subjects they were weaker in. This is helping to encourage the attitude that women are just as smart as men.

Q. Will this 50/50 quota system spread to cabinet positions, and other state entities?

A. Currently all government has a 30% quota but we are campaigning for it.

Q. Alongside the empowerment of women, changing the attitudes of men is also important for promoting gender equality. What are you doing to educate men about the importance of empowering women?

A. Among female MPs there is a saying 'don't become a political widower', which means that it is important to fulfil family duties along side their job as a politician. The TWPG try to emphasise to men that empowerment of women doesn't change family life. This is helping to convince men that it doesn't matter whether it is the husband or the wife who earns the income. Another important point is that the Ministry of Gender always includes men in policy discussions, meetings, and conferences, as it is important to convey that gender equality is an issue of importance to both men and women.

Chair: As visitors to the UK, do you (the TWPG) have any questions for the British audience?

Q. (From TWPG) In Parliament today the delegation witnessed the vigorous debate between the government and opposition, and the clear benefits this brings in terms of scrutiny of politics. Where do ordinary people get the opportunity to influence this and to have their voices heard by politicians?

A. Local MPs can be contacted by phone, email, letter, or on their website. They also hold 'surgeries' where constituents can meet and talk with them for 10 to 15 minutes. Strong and organised civil society groups also play a role, by through advocacy and campaigns. They get the attention of politicians through media coverage and public support on issues.

Q. (From TWPG) Climate change is recognised as a big threat in Tanzania. What measures is the UK taking on this front?

A. There are strong feelings about this in the UK. The UK stood alongside Africa at Durban (in contrast to the USA, Canada, and China). The UK also has legislation and targets for reducing emissions. The key challenge now is to build Durban into a global agreement.

About the Speakers

Hon Anna Margareth Abdalla MP is a Member of Parliament in the National Assembly of Tanzania and Chairperson of the Tanzania Women Parliamentary Group (TWPG). Prior to her current appointment, she was the Minister of Health for Tanzania. Other government posts she has held include Minister for Public Works, Minister for Agriculture and Livestock Development, and Minister for Local Government, Community Development, Co-operatives and Marketing.

Hon Susan Lyimo is Vice Chairperson of the TWPG and Special Seat MP for the CHADEMA party.

Hon Angellah Jasmine Kairuki is Secretary General of the TWPG and Special Seat MP representing Trade Unions for the CCM party.

Hon Esther Matiko is a TWPG Executive Member and Special Seat MP for the CHADEMA party.

Hon Riziki Omar Juma is a TWPG Executive Member and Special Seat MP representing Zanzibar for the CUF party.

Hon Al Shaymaa Kwegyir is a Special Seat MP representing Persons with Disability for the CCM party.

Hon Beatrice Shelukindo is the Chair for Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, Member of the Union for Tanzanian Women (UWT), and Kilindi Constituency MP for the CCM party.

Hon Agripina Z. Buyogera represents Kasulu Vijijini Constituency, and is Chairperson of the Women's Association for the NCCR-MAGEUZI party.

Hon Magdalena Sakaya is a Special Seat MP for the CUF party.

Hon Namelok Sokoine is a Special Seat MP for the CCM party.

Hon Fakharia Shomar Khamis is a Special Seat MP for Zanzibar for the CCM party.

Mrs Justina Mwaja Shauri is Principal Clerk Assistant for the TWPG.