

**Girls
Gone
Political**



AMINI
CENTRE FOR POLICY RESEARCH



Strengthening Gender Equality and Combating Sexual Harassment in Zambian Political Parties

Position Paper



Background

Girls Gone Political (GGP) is a grassroots social movement founded in Zambia in 2020. The movement's goal is to fight for the increased participation and representation of meaningful young women in politics and public service. GGP works to achieve this goal through a variety of activities, including grassroots engagement & campaigns, training, inter-generational mentorship, and civic education advocacy.

GGP is particularly focused on addressing the challenges that young women face in participating in politics, such as gender stereotypes, lack of access to education and financial resources, and violence against women in politics.

With this mandate, GGP with support from ActionAid Zambia under the SPA III project on Transformative Youth-Led Engagement, the movement embarked on a project to Strengthen Youth Political Party Wings to Develop a Model Gender Equality Policy & Sexual Harassment Policy for Political Parties in Zambia'.

GGP worked in tandem with Amini Centre for Policy Research, a youth-led public policy think tank to carry out this study and develop this document.

A fact-finding mission was done among the following political parties to interview some members about gender equality and sexual harassment report mechanisms, this was preceded by a two-day capacity-building workshop to collect in-depth insight and learn from experiences and develop this paper. The political parties represented were: United Party for National Development, Patriotic Front, Socialist Party, PNUP, MMD, & Heritage Party. The criterion used was based on current representation in parliament and the vote share from Zambia's 2021 general elections.

Executive Summary

In Zambia, women continue to face a multitude of formal and informal barriers to political participation. Despite the historical appointments of women to key decision-making positions such as Vice-President, Speaker of the National Assembly, Chief Justice, Head of the Anti-Corruption Commission, Auditor General, Head of the Drug Enforcement Commission, President of the Constitutional Court, and Judge President of the Court of Appeal.

In 2023, Zambia has a representation of 15.7% of women in parliament, out of this, there is only 1 young female MP below the age of 35 and below 8% of women elected at local government level.

However, the opportunity for women to be elected to office is not equal to men. Research has demonstrated that political socialization, resources, clientelism, and party systems impede women's representation. Additionally, scholars have started to investigate sexual harassment in politics as a further barrier that remains largely unaddressed by political parties.

Gender inequality and sexual harassment are multifaceted injustices owing to traditional gender roles, societal norms, power imbalance, and lack of institutionalisation.

To achieve Gender equality and combat sexual harassment, political parties should work towards formulating intra-policies that will complement the laws of Zambia such as the **Anti-Gender Based Violence Act of 2011** and the **Gender Equity and Equality Act of 2015**. The Model policy should be aligned with sexual harassment and gender equality in the political environment in Zambia.

Whilst acknowledging the government efforts in ensuring gender equality and combating violence against women, we firmly believe that political parties bear the greatest responsibility in this regard. Therefore, it is imperative for political parties to adopt and effectively enforce comprehensive gender equality and sexual harassment policies and reporting mechanisms.

This position paper argues that gender equality and prevention of sexual harassment can be achieved by capacitating the youth & women's leagues of political parties, collaborations with civil societies, formulation, and implementation of quotas, and strengthening the reporting mechanisms to encourage victims of sexual harassment.

Advancing Gender Equality and Addressing Sexual Harassment within Zambian Political Parties

The fight to achieve the full and effective participation of women in decision-making positions on an equal footing with men is making slow progress. Women still continue to face many obstacles to discourage or remove them from political life.

Among those obstacles, violence against women in politics is one of the most devastating. It is a violation of the human and political rights of women, with long-lasting and harmful effects on those affected, on democratic processes and on political institutions, as well as on society as a whole.

According to the British Council the World Bank (2017) revealed that at 18% Zambia had the lowest proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament in Sub-Saharan Africa. Further the United Nations Development Programme (2022) revealed that Zambia currently boasts a majority female population over 50%, however women represented 20.5% of political and public service positions in the country. The regional average is projected at just below 25 %.

The representation of women in parliament has seen a decrease when comparing the current representation to that of 2017, falling short of achieving gender parity and limiting women's influence in shaping policies and legislation. Women face various barriers, including societal norms, cultural biases, and unequal access to resources and opportunities. These factors hinder their participation, advancement, and leadership in political parties and public office.

Within political parties, women encounter barriers such as limited access to decision-making positions, internal power dynamics, and exclusion from key party structures. These factors contribute to the perpetuation of gender disparities and hinder women's ability to shape party policies and agendas.

Sexual harassment in politics is often considered a 'hidden' form of violence, as it is difficult to observe and measure. In addition, neither the victims nor the parties involved have incentives to report incidents, making it extremely challenging to track the problem.

Victims who speak out risk losing their political benefits within their party, while leaders who accept and denounce such incidents may face a significant reputational cost in the form of losing votes, securing adoption, or career advancement.

Furthermore, this power imbalance perpetuates a hostile and exploitative environment, limiting women's ability to participate freely. The absence of robust institutional frameworks within political parties contributes to the lack of implementation and enforcement of policies addressing sexual harassment. This creates a culture of impunity and denies the victim's access to justice and support.

The U.S Embassy in Zambia (2021) reported that the NGO Gender Organizations' Coordinating Council received many reports of sexual harassment in the workplace but noted stringent evidence requirements often prevented survivors from filing charges against their harassers.

Family pressure on survivors to withdraw complaints, especially when perpetrators were also family members, also hampered prosecution.

Further, the International Labour Organisation highlighted that whatever form sexual harassment takes, it results in an unsafe and hostile work environment for the person experiencing it, as well as for witnesses and co-workers.

We have noted that the absence of clear policies and reporting mechanisms to address sexual harassment within political parties exacerbates the problem. The lack of awareness, inadequate reporting mechanisms, and limited consequences for perpetrators contribute to a culture of impunity, making it difficult for victims to come forward and seek redress.

Current Policies

In promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, Zambia has strengthened the policy and legal frameworks. Zambia is a signatory to the 1995 Beijing Platform Declaration that prompts Governments to make deliberate efforts to empower women across all sectors of society into taking up decision-making positions. Zambia is a signatory to several international human rights instruments that commit to promoting and protecting the rights of women.

Zambia is a signatory to several international instruments providing for gender equality including:

Universal Declaration on Human Rights & United Nations Convention on the Political Rights on Women that's relates to participation of women in politics and decision-making which states that:

Article 3 - Women shall be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination. Women shall be entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination.

Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1991);

Article 7- Provides that: Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government.

Zambia has also enacted national laws to address gender-based violence and sexual harassment. The Anti-Gender-Based Violence Act that criminalizes various forms of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, and provides mechanisms for reporting, protection, and support for survivors. The Employment Code Act (2019) establishes guidelines for addressing sexual harassment in the workplace, emphasizing the importance of prevention, reporting, and appropriate sanctions.

The Gender Equity and Equality Act (2015) promotes gender equality in all sectors of society, including politics. It prohibits gender discrimination and provides mechanisms for addressing gender-based inequalities and disparities.

The National Gender Policy (2014) provides a comprehensive framework for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment across sectors. It focuses on eliminating gender-based discrimination, increasing women's participation in decision-making processes, and combating violence against women.

The current policies aspire to ensure that gender equality is realised, and sexual harassment prevented in the development process by redressing the existing gender disparities and combating sexual harassment for sustainable development. However, despite various efforts, it has not been implemented in a manner that ensures the realisation of gender equality and effectively combats sexual harassment.

To support the strengthening of gender equality and combating sexual harassment in Zambian politics, the brief suggests specific policy recommendations.

Policy Recommendations

These recommendations aim to promote a more inclusive and equitable political landscape that respects the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their gender or background. By taking proactive measures to strengthen gender equality, enhance women's representation, and combat sexual harassment, Zambia can create a political environment that fosters diversity, inclusivity, and meaningful participation.



Policy and Legislative Reforms

Enhance and enforce existing legislation, the Electoral Process Act No. 32 of 2021, should specifically address sexual harassment within political party settings. By updating the Code of Conduct for all party members to become gender sensitive comprehensive gender equality policies and guidelines for political parties, with clear provisions on preventing and addressing sexual harassment. Ensure effective implementation and enforcement mechanisms for gender equality.



Capacitating Women's Wings

Ensuring all spaces in a political party are accessible and safe for everyone. The capacity of women's leagues within political parties should be strengthened through intra-party capacity building training programs, sensitisation awareness campaigns for party members on gender equality, women's empowerment, and prevention of sexual harassment and allocating adequate resources. This will enable these groups to effectively contribute to decision-making processes.



Formulation and Implementation of Gender Quotas

Gender quotas in politics are an important tool for promoting gender equality and increasing women's representation in key decision-making positions. This can be done by reserving seats for women, ensuring a more balanced representation of both women and men in political positions and that all segments in society have a voice in political decision-making.



Strengthen Reporting and Support Mechanisms

Implementing confidential and accessible reporting mechanisms to encourage victims of sexual harassment to come forward and seek redress. Provide support services such as counselling, legal assistance, and protection for victims of sexual harassment.



Collaboration and Advocacy

Collaborating with civil society organizations, women's rights groups, and relevant stakeholders to advocate for stronger legal frameworks, policies, and initiatives aimed at addressing sexual harassment in political parties. This collective effort can bring about broader societal change and reinforce the commitment to gender equality.



Women's Empowerment

Creating and adopting measures to improve female candidates access to political finance and resources including access to media campaigns to address the financial barriers they often face.

By implementing these recommendations, Zambia can make significant progress in strengthening gender equality, promoting women's empowerment, and creating inclusive and safe political environments that are free from sexual harassment.

These actions will contribute to a more democratic and representative political landscape in the country.

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