

## **THE WILDAF INTERIM REPORT ON THE BASELINE SURVEY ON WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

### **Introduction**

Prior to the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2006 Tripartite elections, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) undertook a number of advocacy activities aimed at increasing the participation of women as both candidates as well as voters. These activities included but were not limited to the sensitization of women voters as well as capacity building for women candidates. Furthermore, WiLDAF conducted a baseline survey in fifteen districts aimed at assessing the challenges and experiences that women face as candidates in national elections, the public perceptions of women candidates, the level of political parties support to women candidates. The baseline survey revealed that the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2006 elections failed to help the country escape its electoral inauspicious background, insofar as the participation of women in elections is concerned.

### **Women as Candidates**

While many observers were hoping that the 2006 Tripartite elections would change Zambia's male dominated electoral landscape by re-defining the political gender test, the elections failed to do so. Whereas women made good use of the demographic status by enjoying a numerical advantage at the voting roll by constituting 52.02% of the recorded 3,940,053 voters by the Electoral Commission of Zambia, this was not the case at the '*candidate roll*'. For instance, out of the five presidential candidates, none was a woman.

At Parliamentary level, the statistics are even more appalling. The distribution here by gender shows that only 106 out of the 709 parliamentary candidates were women. Furthermore, only 27 of the 130 independent parliamentary candidates were women. At the local government level where one would expect more women to participate, the situation was very discouraging. WiLDAF notes with grave concern that out of the 4,095 candidates at the local government level, only 387 were women representing a mere 9.5%.

### **Survey Findings**

The findings of the survey are that Zambia's electoral regime has "built in" obstacles which hinder the meaningful participation of women as candidates and thus will always fall short of being credibly characterized as "*free and fair*". The WiLDAF administered baseline survey revealed that challenges women encountered can be classified in three. First and foremost women are limited by scarcity of resources, these include financial resources, logistical support, training and information. Secondly women lack educational qualifications while some are crippled by illiteracy. Thirdly, political socialization of women and men, public perceptions and stereotypes of politics have posed a tremendous challenge for women. Lastly and more importantly, political parties' failure to adopt affirmative action measures in regard to their female members wishing to stand.

The WiLDAF administered survey confirmed the foregoing challenges. For example, notwithstanding that WiLDAF conducted capacity building initiatives empowering women to effectively contest local government elections. Due to the factors outlined above, women participation was not satisfactory. For instance, out of a total of 438 women trained to participate in the local government elections, 97 or 22% actually applied to be adopted as candidates by various political parties and only 57 women candidates, representing 13% were adopted by various political parties, which is far below the critical SADC threshold of 30%. This shows that without affirmative action measures by political parties and the state, the SADC 30% threshold will remain unattainable by Zambia.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, WiLDAF calls for a broad policy and legal shift that will help the country overthrow the challenges that women face in their attempt to participate in political leadership at Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government levels. It is our considered view that this can be achieved through policy and legislative reform as well as reform of the culture and practices of Zambian politics. It is therefore, now imperative that the draft constitution which has measures for affirmative action and an Elections Act that contains the recommended mixed member proportional representation be enacted in readiness for the 2011 elections. WiLDAF calls upon its partners to assertively demand that the state meets its obligations as agreed upon in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development and at national level the National Gender Policy. It is now time to ensure that the deeply entrenched socio-cultural attitudes and practices sustained by a legislative regime that is essentially hostile to the enhanced participation by women in politics are brought to holt. It is the hope of WiLDAF that the 2011 elections will offer the women of this country an opportunity to fully participate in the political arena without the challenges that were met in this year's elections.