The Critical Mass Theory And Quota Systems Debate

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Abstract: It has been argued theoretically by many scholars that a critical mass ranging from 30 to 35 percent of women is needed before major changes in legislative institutions, behaviour, policy priorities, and policy voting occurs. During the last decade, the idea of a critical mass has reached fever peach as an explanation for women's legislative representation and behaviour. The assumption is that once a critical mass of elected women is reached, it will lead to changes in political behaviour, institutions, and public policy that will radically transform legislatures. This idea has gained increasing currency as women have improved their proportion of representation in legislative bodies all over the world. Although the idea of a critical mass is now widely accepted, it has not been subjected to the same theoretical or empirical investigation as many other concepts which are commonly employed in political representation and participation debates. There are two major problems with the concept. The first is that the percentage membership in an institution which women must obtain in order to function as a critical mass is often vague. Is there a single percentage which has universal acceptance, or are there different percentages for different countries? The second problem is that, irrespective of the accepted percentage, there is very little empirical evidence to support such effects.

Key words: critical mass, critical structures, critical junctures, proportional representation

1. Introduction

A question that frequently arises in access debates is the extent to which women have to be represented in specific numbers in order to make a difference. A critical mass is a threshold number or percentage of women in a decision-making body necessary for transforming the decision-making context from one in which a women-friendly policy is unlikely to one in which the opportunities for women's policy successes are increased (Mansbridge, 1999). Political scientists concerned with gender relations have long been interested in the numbers of women in decision-making positions. Women make up 52% of the world's population, yet average only 16% of the world's elected political posts (United Cities Local Government, 2004). This has led to calls for action that would increase the number of women in decision-making bodies on arguments of justice and on claims that an increase will substantively change decision-making processes and outcomes. The concept of critical mass came to the fore in political science after the publication of Dahlerup's 1988 article "From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics." On the basis of the idea that the form of a decision-making body will shape the processes and policies of that body, Dahlerup drew on a 1977 study by Rosabeth Moss Kanter of the interactions in groups composed of people of different cultural categories or statuses. Kanter (1977) presented a typology of four group types in order to investigate the effect of changing group dynamics on organisational culture. From her work, two group types emerged as the most important in critical mass debates – the *skewed* group, where the minority constituted a maximum of 15% and are regarded as "tokens", and the *tilted* group, in which the minority hold between 15% and 40% membership and is 'becoming strong enough to begin to influence the culture of the group'. While Kanter's study is central to the concept of critical mass, her proportions only

rarely appear in critical mass inquiries, with Dahlerup's suggestion of 30% as the point of critical mass making it into both political science and into the political imagination of many nations (Childs, 2004). The notion of a "critical mass" is supported by a 1992 study by the United Nations, which concludes that "only a critical mass of 30% to 35% of women in politics will make a significant difference to the political culture due to the priority women give to 'the needs of other women, children, elderly, disabled and disadvantaged" (in Porter, 1999: 85). It is also supported by a number of scholars (Mansbridge, 1999; Drage, 1997; Vickers, 1997 Lovenduski, 1998). In her research on women leaders in government in New Zealand (Drage, 1997) points to the influence of a critical mass of women in decision-making positions in government and legislative bodies in that country. She maintains that these women provide transformative leadership by redefining political priorities, placing new items on the agenda and providing new perspectives on mainstream issues. Part of the debate about substantive changes in political decision-making has centred on whether women in decision-making must reach a "critical mass" in order to bring about changes in the political arena (Dahlerup, 1988). Much of this debate is centred on the "politics of presence" (Phillips, 1995). In these debates, the messenger as well as the message is seen as important and women politicians are seen not only to be "standing as" women but also "acting for" women as a group once elected (Pitkin, 1967; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). This assertion is based not on a belief in an essential link between sex and representation but on the way in which women experience the world and how this affects their actions if elected as political representatives. Williams (1998: 106) indicates: "The representative who is capable of acting as an advocate for women's interests must have some understanding of the ways in which the lives of her constituency are shaped by the privilege of men and the most

effective starting point for that knowledge is the fact of her own experience of exclusion and subordination."

2. The Critical Mass Argument

The critical mass argument is primarily applied to situations where women have not reached 30% in decision-making bodies. The argument is that it is unrealistic to expect major changes until women's representation has reached a critical mass because a small number of women in politics tend to be tokens. Originally the term critical mass was borrowed from nuclear physics, where it refers to the quantity needed to start a chain reaction, an *irreversible turning point,* a take-off into a new process or situation. By analogy, it has been said that a qualitative shift will take place when women exceed a proportion of 30% in an organisation. In this way, the move from a small to a large minority is significant. Thus the numbers or rather percentages count (Dahlerup, 1988). The critical mass theory is mainly used to cover two different situations. Firstly, it is being used by female politicians who are defending themselves against the critique primarily brought forward by the women's movements and some feminists that women politicians do not make enough of a difference once elected. Secondly, advocates of enhancing women's representation have frequently used the critical mass argument. It is said that political parties should nominate not just the obligatory lone woman but at least a critical mass of women, because the voters demand it or in order to ensure that the elected women are not just a token few. The 2000s decade has witnessed the critical mass argument being used among advocates of the introduction of electoral gender quotas in order to affect a rapid increase in the number of female politicians (Dahlerup, 2005). International organisations, transnational networks, party politicians, women's activists, and even ordinary citizens argue that women should constitute 30% of all political bodies, the magic number where women in decision-making are said to be able to make a difference (Mansbridge, 2003). As the notion of critical mass has gained wide currency in the real world, however, many scholars have come to question its utility and relevance for analysing women's behaviour in decision-making bodies. Indeed as the number of studies grows, it is increasingly obvious that there is neither a universal nor a single relationship between the percentage of women elected to political office and the passage of decisions or legislations beneficial to women as a group (Mansbridge, 2003). In some cases, women are able to work more effectively together as their numbers grow, but in others, women appear to make a difference – in fact, sometimes a greater difference – when they form a small minority of representatives, either because their increased numbers provoke a backlash among male counterparts or because their increased numbers allow individual women to pursue other policy goals. These contradictions thus raise the question of whether should feminists give up on critical mass, or are there any compelling reasons either theoretical or practical for retaining the concept in debates on women's political representation (Childs and Krook, 2006). The concept of critical mass has provided optimism to scholars, activists and politicians interested in promoting both the descriptive and substantive representation of women. To most of them the entry of women to political office has not yet resulted in the widespread of feminisation of politics because there are

simply not enough of them to "make a difference" (Phillips, 1995). The solution therefore, has been to argue for measures to achieve a "critical mass" of women who could press for women-friendly policy changes. As these claims have grown increasingly more popular in the policy world, a growing amount of scholarly research has cast their validity into doubt. Given the above opposing views, should feminists give up on critical mass? The answer can be both yes and no. On the one hand, it is believed that the critical mass theory should be firmly discarded. Expecting an automatic change once women attain a certain proportion of seats in decision-making bodies is theoretically dubious and perhaps even more seriously undermines the case for women's increased presence if existing female politicians appear to be failing women as a group (Childs, 2004). On the other hand, it is recognised that the concept of critical mass has proven extremely useful in making concrete gains in the "real world", as it insists that a few token individuals are not sufficient for provoking large-scale policy changes. To reconcile these two theoretical and practical concerns, two propositions can be made:

a) Opening up the research question to explore the various actors, strategies, and outcomes consistent with the substantive representation of women across space and time; and

b) Focusing on "critical actors" and their role in pursuing policy change, either alone or together with others as a more precise, theoretical and practical strategy for understanding which kinds of women and men are most likely to represent women's concerns in political office (Childs and Krook, 2006: 20).

To advocate giving up on critical mass is neither an insignificant nor a purely academic concern. It runs the very real risk of leaving supporters of women's representation without a crucial tool for increasing the number of women elected to political office. A closer look at the academic literature, however, reveals that it has been interpreted and applied in many different ways. In her seminal contributions to these debates, Kanter (1977: 238) outlines three expectations regarding increased numbers of women in political life which are:

a) With an increase in their relative numbers, women are potential allies, can form coalitions, and can affect the culture of the group;

b) With an increase in their relative numbers, women can begin to become individuals differentiated from one another and;

c) With an increase in their absolute numbers, despite few changes in their relative numbers, women can develop supportive alliances and affect the culture of the group so long as they are "feminist" or "women-identified women."

Bringing these three insights into the field of women and politics, Dahlerup (1988) tests the first conjecture but ultimately uses her evidence to reject the notion of critical mass in favour of "critical acts" on the grounds that relative proportions of women seem to be less important than individual policy entrepreneurs in explaining women-friendly policy gains. The critical mass theory reveals multiple facets within what might be considered the substantive representation of women. There is need to open up a range of

possibilities for defining what acting for women might constitute in various places and times. The critical mass theory does not in itself explain, however, how changes in the numbers of women in political assemblies translate more concretely into specific policy outcomes. There is need therefore, to distinguish between critical mass and critical actors in order to identify the concrete representatives and not vague imperatives of "sex" or "gender", which put in motion individual and collective campaigns for women friendly policy change.

2.2 Critical Actors

Critical actors are people who initiate policy proposals on their own, even when women form a small minority and embolden others to take steps to promote policies for women. In some situations, individual men may play a crucial role in advancing women's policy concerns (Tamerius, 1995; Cellis, 2004). Their common feature is relatively low threshold for political action. Critical actors hold attitudes similar to those of other representatives. They are more motivated than others to initiate women-friendly policy reforms. Although they may operate alone, they may also stimulate others to act, setting in motion a momentum for policy change, or alternatively provoking a backlash among those opposed to fundamental reforms. As such, their shape and impact are not absolute as smaller numbers of women may join together in decision-making bodies to promote common goals with great success, while larger numbers may enhance the opportunity for critical acts but may also foil their effects. The concept of critical actors enables an acknowledgement that women's substantive representation can occur in the absence of large numbers or percentages of women. Hence, rather than looking for "when women make a difference" or "whether women act for women", gender and politics scholars should examine "how the substantive representation of women occurs" (Childs, 2004). The development of this approach reflects not only the perception that the link between women's descriptive and substantive representation is more complicated than often acknowledged, but also that existing empirical research itself points to the need for such a shift in research questions and focus. There is therefore a need for a move away from an analysis of what 'women' do in particular political institutions at the macro level (national government), to an investigation of political actors at the micro level (local government). Childs and Krook (2006: 6) support the role of critical actors by indicating that mechanisms for the real representation of women lie within the "critical acts that can lead to changes and change the position of minorities in society." These critical acts include the "introduction of quotas for women, recruitment of women, equality legislation and institutions, and most importantly the willingness and ability of the minority to mobilise the resources of the organisation or institution" (Dahlerup, 1988: 296).

2.1 Critical Structures

The European Network of Experts (1997) argues that the structural elements of each country's political system and environment exert a strong influence on women's effective participation in policy-making. Some particularly important aspects of the political environment are:

(a) The intensity of ideological conflicts and their impact on society, for instance through profound violence and disruption;
(b) Whether gender equality issues are regarded as politically salient;
(c) The degree to which parties are open to dialogue with social movement actors, particularly the women's movement; and
(d) Extreme poverty and human suffering and resulting economic and social dislocation.

The most critical determinant of women's ability to make a difference is the nature of governance and of the political mainstream. The degree of accountability varies among countries. In patronage-oriented systems, accountability will tend to be defined by narrower personal, family or clan interests as well as those of political groups and patrons. More democratic governance is accompanied by more developed mechanisms for public accountability. There is a notion of public good, decision-making posts are viewed as positions of public trust and citizens are more politically mature, aware of their rights and likely to demand accountability from public officials (European Network of Experts, 1997).

2.3 Critical junctures

Critical junctures refers to the unfolding of certain periods or moments when forces combine to provide unprecedented opportunities for women to have influence in the policy-making process. Critical junctures such as peace processes, transitions to democracy, and the drafting of new constitutions, provide opportunities for women's participation (www.un.org). During such periods of change and transition, the monopoly of political parties over policy decisions and the policy formation process in general is relaxed and access expands to non-traditional political actors. These are key moments for the representation of the interests of many different social groups. Such political opportunities are not gender-neutral and women's movements and agencies involved in such processes need to seize these opportunities to push for gender-sensitive reforms. Such moments also allow temporary coalitions to form between women legislators around very specific issues on which there are no major divergences, for example on a package of reforms (www.un.org).

3. Quota system and proportional representation

Chowdhury (1994) discussed the reservation of quotas for women in the national parliaments as well as at the local government level. She inquired whether the presence of women in political bodies was only symbolic or if they indeed do they play an effective role in national and local politics. Her study concluded that the rationale for the rationale for the reservation of positions for women was not intended to create equality of opportunity or outcome for a disadvantaged social category. Actually it was only considered because it is a convenient device to facilitate entry into the decision-making bodies of an excluded and vulnerable group. Quotas for women entail that women must constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body, whether it is a candidate list, a parliamentary assembly, a committee or a government. Quotas aim at in-

creasing women's representation in publicly elected or appointed institutions such as national governments, parliaments and local governments. Gender quotas draw legitimacy from the discourse of exclusion, according to which the main reason for women's under-representation are the exclusionary practices of the political parties and the political institutions at large. Quotas place the burden of candidate recruitment not on the individual women, but on those who control the recruitment processes, first and foremost the political parties. They force those who nominate and select to start recruiting women and give women a chance which they do not have today in most parts of the world (Dahlerup, 2005). Quotas are generally seen as a positive action of laws allocating quotas for women to assist in the promotion of gender balance in decision-making bodies. Most of the countries that have achieved significant increases in women's representation have done so through the use of quotas – a form of affirmative action in favour of women (Mutume, 2004). In 1990, the United Nations Economic and Social Council endorsed a target of 30% women in decision-making positions in the world by 1995. This target was far from met, since in 1995 only 10% of the world's parliamentarians were women and in 2005 only 16%, still far from one-third (IPU, 2007). Quotas are considered as a legitimate means of securing this end (Agbalajobi, 2009). Quotas are also seen as a means of remedying women's under-representation precisely because they acknowledge that women do not constitute a politically distinct group with interests limited to gender-related concerns. Some feminists and political scholars have argued that the representation of women can also be realised in the form of electoral quota systems which can be applied at three different stages of the election process in the form of:

(a) A rule that requires that a certain percentage of women are represented in the list of candidates to be short-listed for consideration as electoral candidates;

(b) Requiring parties to ensure that up to 50% of candidates to be placed on the ballot are women; and

(c) A certain percentage of parliamentary and local government seats being reserved for women. This is becoming the most common form of gender quota assignment (Dahlerup, 2005).

1)   3.1 Why Quotas should be reserved for Women

The quota debate is riddled with arguments for and against. Various theorists (Kanter, 1977; Dahlerup, 1988; Phillips, 1995) have argued that quotas for women are important for the following reasons:

(a) Elected women will serve as role models to other young and old women, encouraging them to participate in politics and even contest future elections;

(b) It is matter of justice that women be included in political structures, as they constitute more than 50% of the population and therefore should not be absent from spheres of power;

(c) Elected women will bring "women's interests" to the formal political sphere. Because men do not understand women's interests, male-dominated political institutions either leave them off the agenda, or they act in a manner that indirectly damages women's position;

(d) Elected women will transform the very culture of politics. This argument relies on an assumption that

women are more caring and cooperative individuals, therefore less prone to factionalism and corruption. Women will then be able to transform today's 'dirty politics' into a more equitable, kind and participatory politics;

(e) Most representatives are confined to voting along party political lines and have few moments of autonomy. In these opportunities for independent thinking, the character and identity of the representatives is significant. Women through their various identities can therefore contribute to the political discourse by adding their unique perspective; and

(f) There is symbolic relevance. The quotas dismantle the status quo and let women feel, and be seen, as represented in the formal decision-making process (Phillips, 1995).

Other scholars have argued that women do not have a feminist consciousness, and thus their descriptive participation through the gender quota will not make any difference to either politics or to women's interests (Farzana, 2002). It has also been riddled with an essentialist assumption that women are an undifferentiated category rather than one divided by class, ethnicity, religion and the urban or rural divide. The treatment of women as a homogeneous group negates the diversity in their social status. Thus, the adequate representation on the reserved seats of the different interests of women belonging to different social groups was ignored. This essentialist approach to gender quotas gave a free hand to political leaders to nominate women of their own choice from their families and from the elite class to the reserved seats for women (Farzana, 2002). As far as mechanisms of representation sponsored by the state are concerned, it is now fairly well established that it is only in countries where there are quotas enabling women's representation that the presence of women in institutions of local governance exceed 15%. However, there is no uniformity of design or practice as far as quotas are concerned. The variety of quota arrangements in different countries and their comparative weaknesses and strength are briefly listed below.

3.1 Bangladesh: Proportional representation with a Constitutional quota

In Bangladesh, Article 9 of the Constitution promotes the special representation of women in local government. In recent years, a constant pressure on the *Union Parishad* (the lowest tier of the existing local government structure in Bangladesh) from academia, citizens and women's groups, a protected process, to provide adequate gender representation has led to the Union Parishad Amendment Act 1997 (Panday, 2008). This in itself was a remarkable initiative for providing adequate representation to women. The Constitution of Bangladesh provides equality of women and men. There is no legal barrier to women contesting or voting for any elective office, including that of the Head of State. Article 9 of the Constitution promotes the special representation of women in local government (*Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*, 1972). Although the constitution grants equal rights to all citizens in all spheres of life, there have been very few women in local government. In 1976, a provision was made for two nominated female members in addition to nine elected members and one chairperson in each Union Parishad,

which increased to three nominated women members in 1983 (Panday, 2008). In 1992, it was changed to indirect election where three nominated women members in each local government body were supposed to be elected by the chairperson and other elected members. This process of filling women's seats in the local councils totally ignored the scope of women's active participation and role in these political organisations where policies and decided and crucial plans for local development are formulated. The nominated women could not play more than the role of a 'yes' person of the chairperson and members, who were predominantly men (Khan, 1993).In 1997, the Union Parishad Ordinance of 1983 was amended and through this amendment, for the first time, provision was made for direct elections for the female members to three reserved seats for women in the Union Parishad (*The Local Government Union Parishad Amendment Act*, 1997). In Bangladesh, though the female chairpersons and members have gained enough confidence in their ability to discharge administrative duties, the discriminatory attitude of their male counterparts has been the main stumbling block. According to the Local Government Ordinance, elected women Union Parishad members will act as chairperson in at least three of 12 standing committees of the Union Parishad. But in reality it is found that in many of the Union Parishads, the Standing Committees have not been formed. Moreover, where they are formed, the women members have no responsibilities despite their inclusion in the committees (Shamim, 1999; Gay, 2002). It is necessary to explain the significance of the 1997 Act as compared to earlier reform initiatives. The said Act introduced the system of direct elections for women at the local government level for the first time. As a result, direct election has generated considerable enthusiasm among women in Bangladesh. Prior to the introduction of this Act in 1997, the number of women contesting local government elections was too small to be viewed as examples (Panday, 2008). As the direct election system came into operation, the people of Bangladesh have increasingly accepted that women would take part in local government elections. However, the process came under serious threat from religious fundamentalists in some places who declare *fatwa* (in Islamic legal parlance, this refers to the clarification of an ambiguous judicial point or an opinion by a jurist trained in Islamic law*)* by saying that Islamic Law does not permit women's leadership and that casting votes in favour of women is illegal (Shehabuddin, 1999). Notwithstanding this, women have participated in local elections in an increasing number (Shamim and Nasreen, 2002).

3.2 Ghana: Proportional representation with no Constitutional quota

Since independence in 1957, Ghana has gone through a number of efforts to decentralise political and administrative authority from the centre to the local level. The most comprehensive effort began in 1988, when extensive powers and competencies were transferred to districts. A total of 110 district assemblies were created as legislative, executive, planning and rating authorities (Ofey-Aboagye, 2000). The decentralisation process was undertaken with the key aspirations in mind:

(a) To provide more responsive, equitable and participatory development;

(b) To bring government and decision making nearer to the people and quicken the processes; and

(c) To serve as a training ground in political activity.

The requirements in the design of the decentralisation process should have made the participation of women in public decision-making easier. They include those for a non-partisan local government system, the freedom to use the local language for the business of the assembly and the discretion in creating additional sub-committees. The latter could have provided a sharper focus on responding to the concerns of various sections of the population, especially women. The initial participation of women in local government was low and has remained so. In 1994, women made up about 3% of the elected members. In 1998, this proportion rose to 5%. This was very interesting given that women constitute just about half of all registered voters (Ofey-Aboagye, 2000). In 1998, the Government of Ghana gave a directive that reserved 30% of the appointed membership of assemblies for women. Examinations of the proportions of appointed members suggest that assemblies selected just around 30%, even though that was supposed to be the minimum. In 1994 only three of the 110 *Presiding Members* (custodians of the good behaviour and financial propriety in the assembly) were women. In 2010, women accounted for only 19 out of 230 positions in parliament (8.3%), and as few as 11 out of 170 (6.5%) District Chief Executives in local government (Craw-ford, 2010). Women have been constrained from entering local level politics by the lack of finances for campaigning and time constraints needed to manage domestic responsibilities, income generation activities and political work. The widely held perception that political activity is 'dirty' and not for decent women has also acted as a barrier. Women have also not been voted for because politics is often viewed as belonging to an arena which is best managed by men (UNDP, 1998). Inside the assemblies, women are yet to make their presence felt. In spite of the increases in their numbers provided for by the government directive, their performance has been muted. This has been attributed to lack of self-confidence, a limited capacity to communicate in English and a lack of understanding of assembly procedures. Two main approaches were adopted to try and make local government more responsive to women and gender concerns and to help enhance women's participation in governance. The first category has focused on building the capacity of women to aspire to, attain and perform in local government office; and on women's groups to engage local governments. The second has sought to encourage stakeholder institutions such as the district assemblies, training institutions and agencies providing services and implementing development initiatives to provide appropriate support to women's concerns by targeting, positive action, creating an enabling environment for their participation, advocacy, education and the provision of resources. In both approaches, there has been extensive European support, materially, financially and in the form of technical assistance. Other strategies adopted by European development organisations have aimed at mainstreaming gender by recognising and providing for gender differences in the design and implementation of programmes and activities (Ofey-Aboagye, 2000).

3.3 South Africa: Proportional representation with political party quotas

In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) demanded equality of status in the ANC and sought to expand their access to power but did not make demands for special mechanisms until the early 1990s, when the transition to democracy opened space to adopt a new approach (Hassim, 2009). Shortly after coming into power in 1994, the ruling ANC of South Africa adopted a non-sexist constitution and a national strategy for advancing gender equality that put South Africa at the cutting edge of experience in state-initiated gender policies and structures (Goetz and Hassim, 2003). As a result of the structures and procedures developed, which are in turn constitutionally enshrined, South Africa is heralded internationally as having one of the most progressive policy frameworks for improving the participation and representation of women in politics. Following the 1995/96 local government elections, only 19% of councillors were women, resulting in heavily male-dominated local councils (Robinson, 1995). This was as a result of the fact that for local government the ward system runs alongside proportional representation. This system accounted for only 40% of seats, and within it even the ANC was not prepared to use its full 30% quota for women in its local government electoral list (Mbatha, 2003). However, by the 2000 elections, the organised voice of women became stronger, with the result that women constituted 28.2% of local government councillors. This was largely the result of the Municipality Structures Act of 1998 which included guidelines stating that "every party must seek to ensure that 50% of the candidates on the party list are women and those women and men candidates are evidently distributed through the list." The legislation also provides for equal representation between women and men on the Ward Committees, something fought for by the Gender and Advocacy Programme (GAP) and other organisations and considered to be a significant victory at the time. While these were guidelines and not a statutory requirement, the ANC nevertheless increased its quota of women to 46% at the local level. Other parties also instituted a local quota, notably the Democratic Alliance (DA), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National People's Organisation (ANPO) (Pottie, 2001). The issue of women's quotas was articulated amid concerns about the risks of entrenching women's status as a marginalised social group confined to and protected through specialised forms of representation. Moreover, the increased proportion of women local councillors was achieved by electing a number of women as ward candidates, so women did not only enter local government through the proportional representation system.

3.4 Lesotho: Constitutional and political party quotas

Lesotho is the shining example when it comes to women's representation in local government in the region and globally, with 58% women in this sphere. The reason for this is that for the first local government elections held in 2005, the country instituted a 30% quota for women through Section 4 of the Local Government Amendment Act of 2004. The Amendment provided for reservations of certain constituencies for all female competition, guaranteeing the election of at least 30% women representatives in community councils. It was the first country in Africa to reserve

constituencies for women (Tolmay, 2008). Every third constituency was set aside for women and these constituencies will rotate over three successive elections, after which the quota system will be reviewed. However, the Lesotho Government has been less eager to implement quotas at the national level, with the result that there are less than half the numbers of women in parliament compared with local government. But despite resistance to quotas at the national level, Lesotho has seen an increase of 13% in the levels of women's representation in the lower house of parliament from 11.6% to 25% in 2007 and women now occupy 53% of local government seats, an indication that even where quotas are not being implemented, the representation of women is on the agenda and increases are being witnessed (Tolmay, 2008).

4. Conclusion

More generally, the critical mass concept suffers from what Weldon (1999) calls the individualistic fallacy, namely, the assumption that mere numbers of women, no matter what their political or ideological views, will affect legislative behaviour and public policy. It can therefore be observed that the practice of the quota system assists in reducing the low level of women's participation in politics, a veritable solution to male-dominated patriarchal societies. It also stereotypes the presence of women, which changes the face of decision-making, providing opportunities for substantive input. This method contributes to a greater extent in improving female intention to participate in politics despite prevailing political structures and societal norms, as 'women's experience is needed and necessary in political life and policy making in order to represent the entire society' (Phillips, 1995). Quotas do not discriminate but compensate women for actual barriers that prevent them from pursuing a political career. Feminist theories of patriarchy have identified men's presence and dominance of political institutions as a major obstacle to women's equality. Men have a crucial role to play in enhancing women's representation and participation. Men themselves can play a significant role in promoting gender equality policy development. As allies, they can support women's initiatives and movements in their efforts towards equality. As major 'gatekeepers' of policy-making institutions, men can leverage women into positions of power either through direct selection and appointment or through putting pressure on other men. The emphasis on men should be seen as a paradigm shift that allows political actors to focus on gender equality training for men in representative and participative arenas.

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