GENDER IN THE 2010 MAURITIUS ELECTIONS





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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1 OVERVIEW

overview



Former Leader of the Opposition and current Prime Minister, Navin Ramgoolam, at a Gender Links workshop prior to the 2005 General Elections.

Synopsis

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the gender, elections and media project run by Gender links (GL), in partnership with the Gender and Media Southern Africa Network (GEMSA) in Mauritius during the May 2010 elections.

The project forms part of a region-wide campaign to increase women's political representation and participation in line with the 2008 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development that aims to achieve gender parity in all areas of decision-making by 2015.

GL conceptualised the project, including tracking countries conducting elections and organising training, while GEMSA conducted the media monitoring. The project covers all the SADC countries that had elections at national, provincial and local level between 2009 and 2011. These include: South Africa, Malawi, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Mauritius, Tanzania and Lesotho.

Mauritius which had its national elections in May 2010 had its workshops in April 2010. Mauritius conducted its national elections on 6 May 2010 under the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system. There were 21 constituencies that were contested, 20 in Mauritius and one in Rodrigues.

Across the SADC region, so far South Africa has the highest number of women in parliament at 41%, followed by Angola at 36%. Countries like Botswana and Namibia have gone backwards, whilst Mauritius has made marginal gains moving forward by 17.1% point to 18.8%. Women's representation in parliament in Botswana currently stands at 7.9% down from 11%, and Namibia slid from 30.8% to 22.2%.

In Mauritius the number of women in cabinet has increased from two to three after the May 2010 election. The appellation of the Ministry of Women's Rights, Family Welfare and Child Protection changed to the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare. A Ministry of Social Integration has been established to combat poverty.

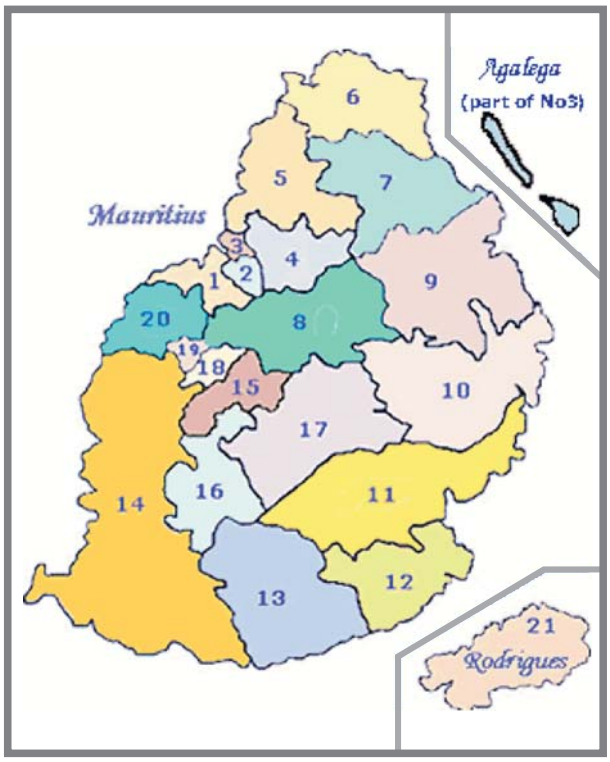
A woman has been appointed Vice President of the Republic. For the first time in the history of Mauritius, a woman is Minister of Health and Quality of Life. The number of private parliamentary secretaries has increased from 12.5% to 30% after the May 2010 elections.

Objectives

The project aimed to:

- Assist the media in understanding how gender equality is integral to citizenship, democracy and freedom of expression.
- Gauge the extent to which the SADC Protocol targets of 50% by 2015 are being honoured.
- Improve media coverage of politics and elections.
- Enhance the capacity of women leaders to engage strategically with the media.
- Conduct a gender audit of the elections, including the performance of the media.

Country context



The Republic of Mauritius is a group of islands in the South West of the Indian Ocean, consisting of the main island of Mauritius, Rodrigues, St Brandon and several outer islands located at distances greater than 350 metres from the main island. The island is 720 square miles. It runs approximately 39 miles from north to south and 28 miles from east to west at its longest and widest points respectively.



Participants at the Women in Politics award ceremony. ***Photo: Loga Virahsawmy***

During the past 30 years, the Mauritian economy has diversified from one based mainly on sugar to manufacturing (mainly textiles and garments) and tourism. The information, communication and technology sector is growing rapidly.

The population as of 1 July 2008 was estimated at 1 268 565. The country boasts an adult literacy rate of 85 %, one of the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. The official language is English, the de facto national language is Mauritian Creole and the language of the media is mostly French.

Parliament

The unicameral parliament of Mauritius, the National Assembly, has 70 members elected for a five-year term. Members are elected from 20 three-member constituencies on the island of Mauritius and one two-member constituency on the island of Rodrigues, under the system of FPTP; eight further assembly seats are apportioned to the "best losers" among the non-elected candidates according to their ethno-religious affiliation (two each for Hindus, Muslims, Chinese and the general population), and proportionally to the major political parties. The head of state is the president, a largely honorary appointment, nominated by the prime minister and ratified by a majority vote of members of the National Assembly. The president, who must be not less than the age of 40, holds office for a five-year term and may be re-elected. The prime minister is the head of government appointed by the president as the member of the assembly best able to command the support of the majority assembly members.

Local Authorities

The Local Authorities in Mauritius fall under the portfolio of the Ministry of Local Government. They currently comprise of five Municipal Councils, four District Councils and one hundred and twenty-four Village Councils. The functioning of these councils is governed by the provisions of the Local Government Act. The statutory duties include cleaning and lighting of roads, the construction, care, maintenance and improvement of public roads, the collection and removal to approved disposal sites of household, industrial, commercial and agricultural waste, the maintenance and cleaning of pavements, drains and streams and the control of pollution causing nuisance.

The National Assembly

Local councils and the legislature (National Assembly) are the country's only two institutions whose members are elected according to the Representation of the People Act and the related regulations. Membership of the National Assembly

is also governed by the Constitution. Local authorities – village, district and municipal councils - are constituted by virtue of the Local Government Act.

At national level, the supreme official executive body is the cabinet and is the emanation of the National Assembly, chaired by the Prime Minister. The cabinet consists of Ministers who, apart from the Attorney-General, must be elected members of parliament.

The General Elections are held every five years. The last General Elections were held in May 2010. The Municipal Elections were held in October in 2005 and Village Elections in November 2005.



A women votes at the elections. *Photo: L'Express*

Gender, politics and the media

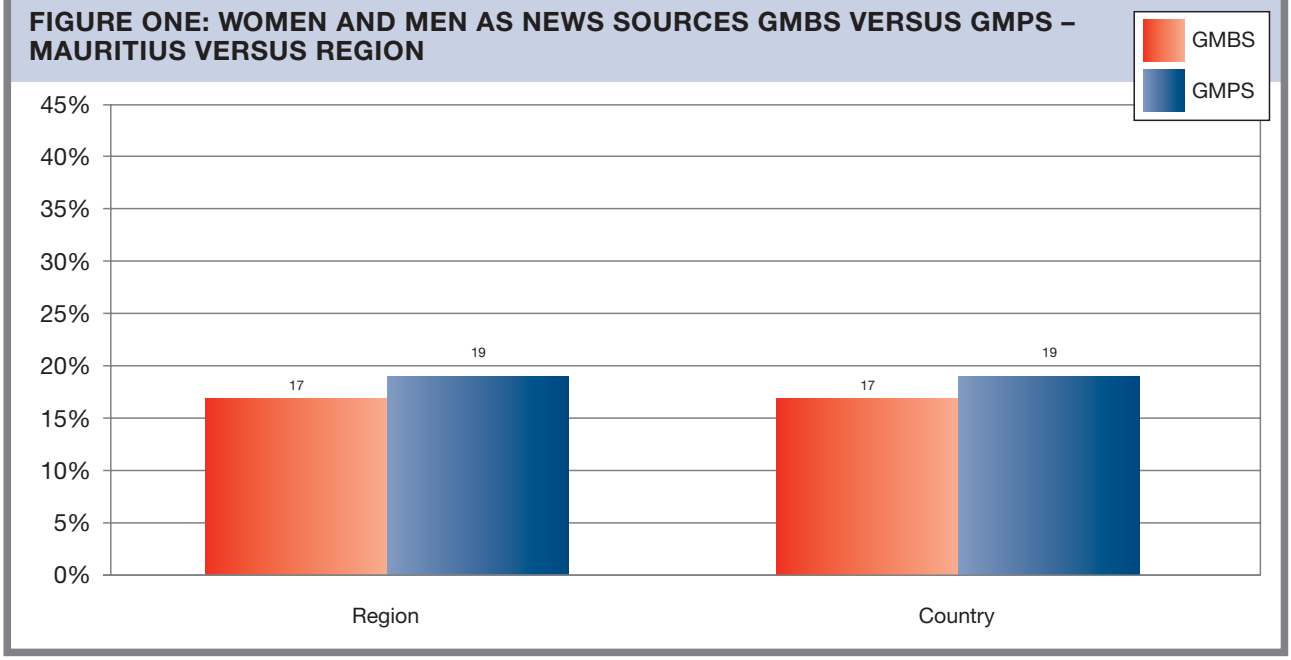
Generally, women politicians have a difficult relationship with the media. The latter argues that women politicians are less accessible than their male counterparts. This project therefore brings women politicians and the media to engage honestly and constructively on issues of mainstreaming gender in political coverage.

GL, in partnership with the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), undertook the Gender and Media Baseline Study in 2003 which formed the backdrop of the Gender and Media Summit in September 2004. This led to the formation of the Gender and Media Southern Africa (GEMSA) Network, with GL and MISA as founding institutional members.

As illustrated in Figure One, the GMBS found that women constituted 17% of news sources in Southern Africa and in Mauritius. In the 2010 Gender and Media Progress Study (GMPS) the proportion of women sources increased from 17% to 19% in the region and in Mauritius. Mauritius has remained fairly stagnant in terms of increasing the proportion of women sources.

Other countries such as South Africa, Namibia and Swaziland also recorded between a 1% and 2% increase in women sources over the last seven years. In the Mauritius GMPS, the proportion of women sources who speak on the topic of politics had gone down from 11% to 9%.

FIGURE ONE: WOMEN AND MEN AS NEWS SOURCES GMBS VERSUS GMPS – MAURITIUS VERSUS REGION



Key components

The project included the following strategic interventions:

- Training journalists to report on the gender dimensions of elections and elections coverage.
- Training women politicians on gender in elections and to interact with the media more effectively.
- General engagement with the media.
- Gender audit of the elections.
- Gender, media and the elections

Outputs

The outputs included:

- Women politicians, as well as media practitioners from print and electronic media, were trained around relevant gender and political issues.
- Profiles and photographs of women politicians.
- Training resource material on gender, elections and the media contributed to the GL Virtual Resource Centre. Several examples of media clippings and case studies were collected and produced during the period.
- Story ideas for elections in mainstreaming gender.
- Opinion and Commentary pieces.

Outcomes

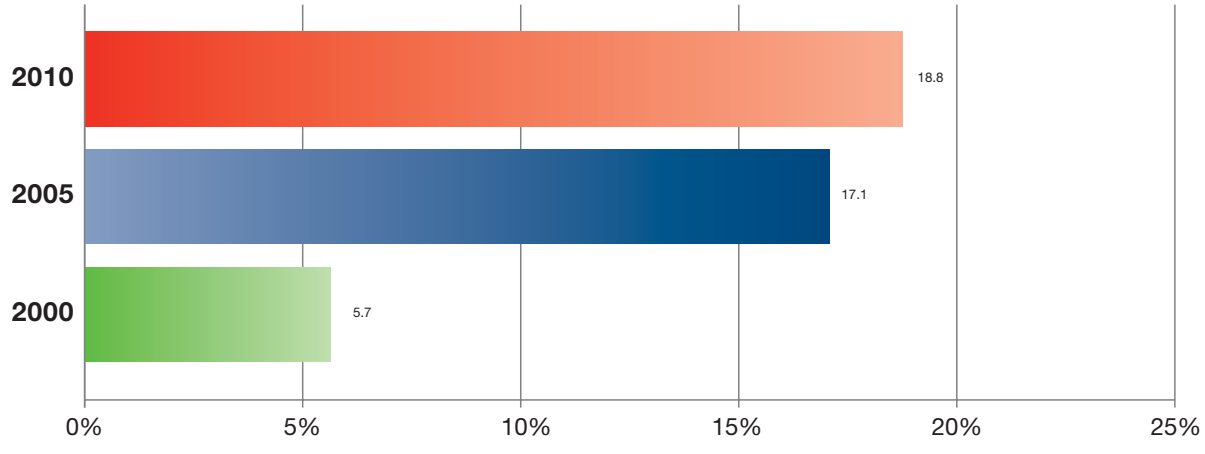
Outcomes that can be directly attributed to the project include:

- Awareness of the role of the media during elections.
- Media practitioners were empowered to design gender-aware programmes and news broadcasts.
- Media practitioners were empowered to mainstream gender in election coverage.
- Women politicians were trained to engage critically with the media
- The work of advocacy organisations in building the capacity of women politicians during the elections is a key achievement.



Marie-Annick Savripene monitors the Mauritian media.
Photo: Gender Links

FIGURE TWO: PROPORTION OF WOMEN ELECTED IN THE LAST THREE MAURITIAN ELECTIONS



As evident in Figure Two, the proportion of women elected in 2005 increased from 5.7% to 17.1%. This represents an increase of 11.4%. But the positive trend did not continue in 2010. The number of women elected only increased by 1.7% in the 2010 election. Mauritius will struggle to achieve the target of 50% women in decision making by 2015 as stipulated in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.

Civil society organisations and political parties are working with women candidates to increase the representation of women at local government level. The local government election is scheduled to take place in 2011.

Lessons learnt

- The fact that the 2010 general elections was a fast one and those involved had only one month to prepare, Gender Links did not have to chance to hold more workshops at a national level.
- Gender Links has discussed with women's leagues of the two major political parties prior, during and after the two workshops about increasing the proportion of women candidates for the local government elections.
- During the political campaigns, both leaders of the two major alliances promised that they would field more women in the 2015 general elections.
- Political parties must ensure that quotas are introduced both at party level and at national level.
- Political parties must put their commitments into action. The main opposition party's constitution stipulates that 20% women must be fielded for all elections but the party has never committed to that. The main leading party has 30% women in its constitution, albeit at party level and not as woman candidates.

Next steps

- To follow up with media and do backstopping to ensure sustainability.
- Gender Links to continue training women in politics.
- The need for constant monitoring and evaluation of progress made towards 50% by 2015.
- The need to take politicians to task in the 2015 general elections on the promise they made of fielding more women in 2015.
- To push for the signing of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development.



Parliamentarians Leela Devi Dookhun (now Minister of Social Security) surrounded by Mirella Martin and Loga Virahsawmy at Award Ceremony. ***Photo: Mary Coopan***

2 STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS

strategic interventions



Former President of the Labour Party and current Vice President of the Republic, Ms Monique Bellepeau, at the Women in Politics award ceremony.
Photo: Loga Virahsawmy

Media training



Media Literacy Awards Ceremony. ***Photo: Saskia Naidoo***

As a follow up to the Gender and Media Baseline Study (GMBS), which found that women are grossly under-represented and misrepresented both within newsrooms and in editorial content in Southern Africa, Gender Links contracted GEMSA to facilitate a course on Gender and Media Literacy for civil society with a focus on elections.

The course involved understanding how the media is constructed; what avenues exist for media consumers to criticise the media (for example letters, call-in shows and complaints to regulators). The course also covered how citizens can use new information and communication technology to create their own media.

The objectives of the course were as follows:

- To run the ten module media literacy course in Mauritius with a focus on elections.
- Participants in the course understand what is meant by media literacy within the broader global context.
- To encourage the public to interact with the media through writing articles, opinion pieces and letters to the editor.
- To raise awareness on how to hold the media accountable.

The 26 participants who successfully completed the course were awarded certificates by the former Attorney General of Mauritius. Two of the participants presented their final projects at the Gender and Media Award Summit in Johannesburg in August 2008.

Women in politics training

Gender Links facilitated two sets of training courses for women in politics in September and November 2009. The four day training course for each group of participants took place at the Media Trust in Port Louis with the financial support of Women in Networking (WIN). The Media Trust provided all the logistical support including venue, computers and internet.

Many women politicians have a love/hate relationship with the media because while they know that they need the media, a lot of research shows that the media often ignore basic ethical principles in its rush to discredit women in powerful positions.

The training courses focused on how the media works, how to analyse its messages and how to access the media.

The objectives of the training courses were as follows:

- To understand how the media works.
- To understand the concepts of gender and governance and the links between them.
- To unpack gender, elections and the media – the different stereotypes, the missing voices.
- To explore the provisions of the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and apply them to their different contexts.
- To hold the media accountable.
- To equip participants with skills to make their voices count.
- To strategise on mainstreaming gender in election campaigns.
- To develop their IT skills for the purposes of communication, advocacy and research.
- To understand transformative leadership.

Ministers and other high officials gave their support to the programme and interacted with participants on the panel Women Politicians and the Media.

Ten participants wrote their profiles after the workshop. The profiles were edited by the GL Mauritius Satellite Office and are on the website of Gender Links.



Loga Virahsawmy explains gender stereotypes at a Women in Politics workshop. ***Photo: Nasseem Ackberry***

NGO strategic communications training

As soon as the date of the General Elections was confirmed, Gender Links facilitated a one day workshop on 22 April 2010 for members of civil society, political and gender activists, as well as media practitioners at Gold Crest Hotel in Quatre Bornes.

The objectives were to:

- Identify key gender, elections and media gaps.
- Empower participants with skills to critically analyse the gendered dimension of elections.
- Equip participants with skills to convey information to the media through the writing of press releases and engaging with the media in general.
- Build relationships between civil society, media decision-makers and practitioners.
- Improve, monitor and evaluate coverage from a gender perspective.

The workshop included 23 participants from a wide range of organisations. The workshop was very close to the General Elections. There would not have been time for training with media houses. Media houses were invited to send participants to the strategic communications workshop. Journalists from La Vie Catholique, Le Defi Media Group, Impact News and the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation attended the workshop.

The GL Mauritius office put together a fact sheet on Women in Politics in Mauritius. The fact sheet explained the situation of women in politics prior to the 2010 elections and asked the following questions:

1. Why has there been so little progress in women's political representation since the 2005 elections? What is the outlook for 2010 at national and local level?
2. Should Mauritius adopt a legislated quota for 2015 general and local government elections?
3. How committed will the next government and leadership be to women's rights and gender equality?
4. What qualities do Mauritians want in their future leaders, generally and in relation to gender in particular?
5. What should be done to ensure that Mauritius signs the Protocol on Gender and Development?

Participants debated why it was important to have more women in politics and the change that

women bring to politics. Participants also did an exercise on women in political decision making in SADC by commenting on the figures below.

FIGURE THREE: WOMEN IN POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING IN SADC

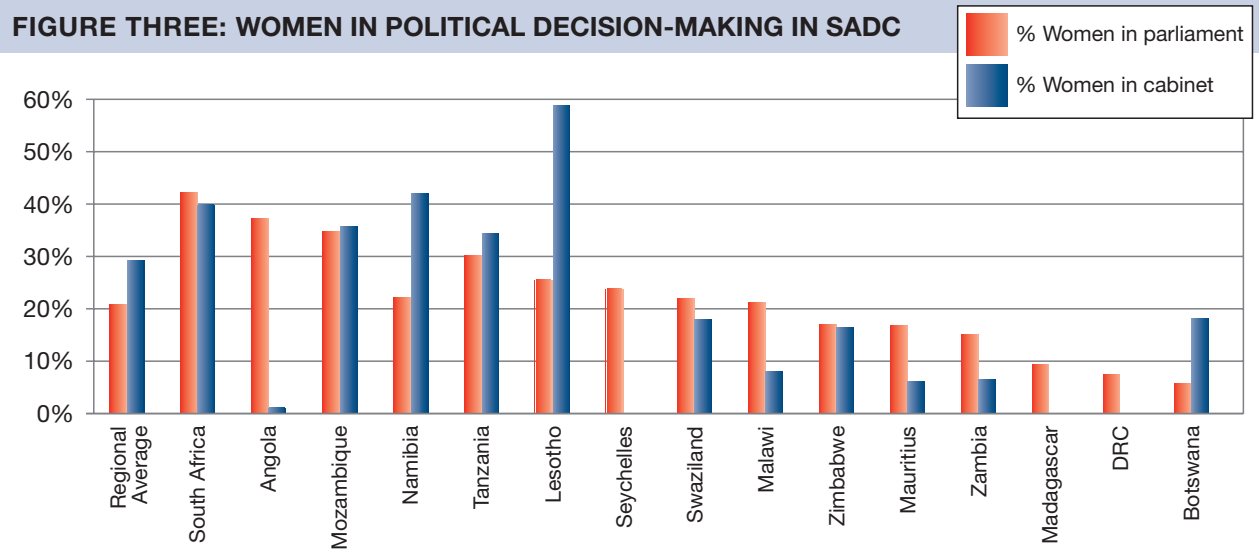
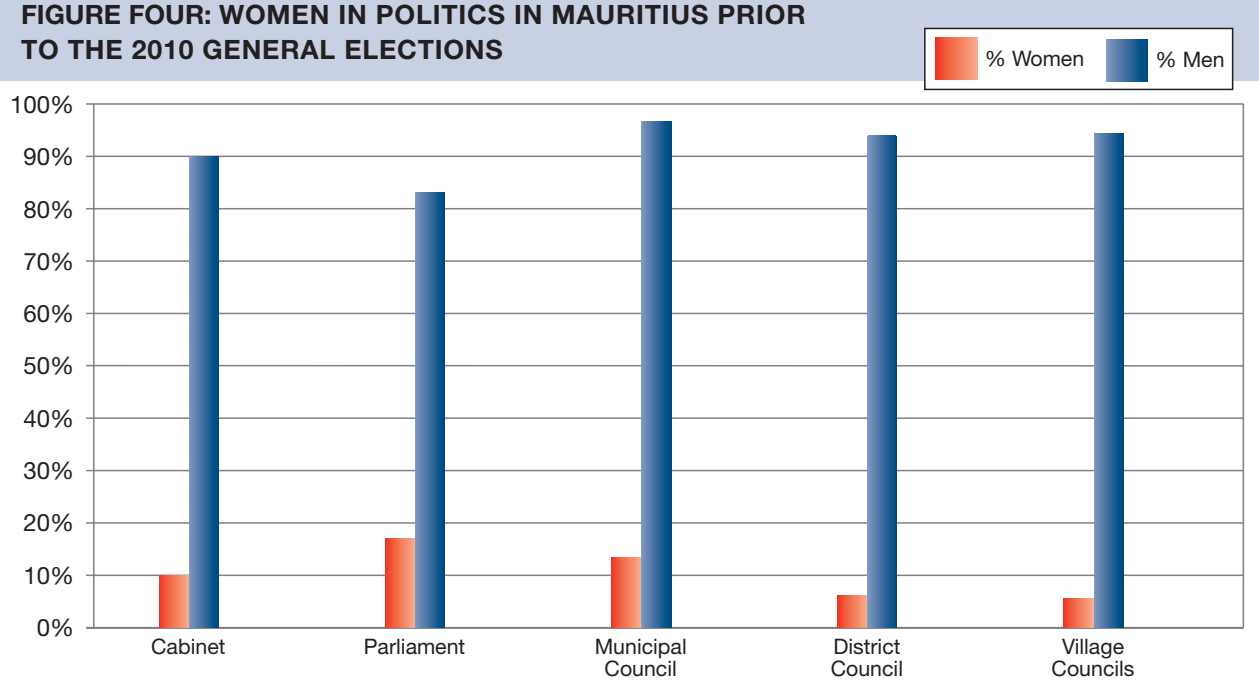


FIGURE FOUR: WOMEN IN POLITICS IN MAURITIUS PRIOR TO THE 2010 GENERAL ELECTIONS



The parliament of Mauritius consists of 70 members among whom, only 12 are women, representing a mere 17.1%. There are only 16 female Urban Councillors out of a total of 126, that is 12.7% and 86 female Rural Councillors out of a total of 1 476, that is 5.8%.

Women in politics and the media – finding women and men in the news

Participants were invited to monitor the media as follows:

- Making use of the day's newspapers to identify all political stories.
- Count the number of female and male sources and take note of what these women and men comment about.

Key issues on gender and elections

The different electoral systems were explained:

- FPTP, where the winners get it all and women are very often marginalised.
- Proportional Representation System, which is a more democratic system and gender friendly, allowing parties to get seats as per the percentage of voters.
- Legislated quota, where women get a chance to be Members of Parliament.
- Party quota, where women get a certain number of chances to run.
- The zebra system at party level, where finally there are equal number of women and men.

Missing in action

The following questions were then discussed:

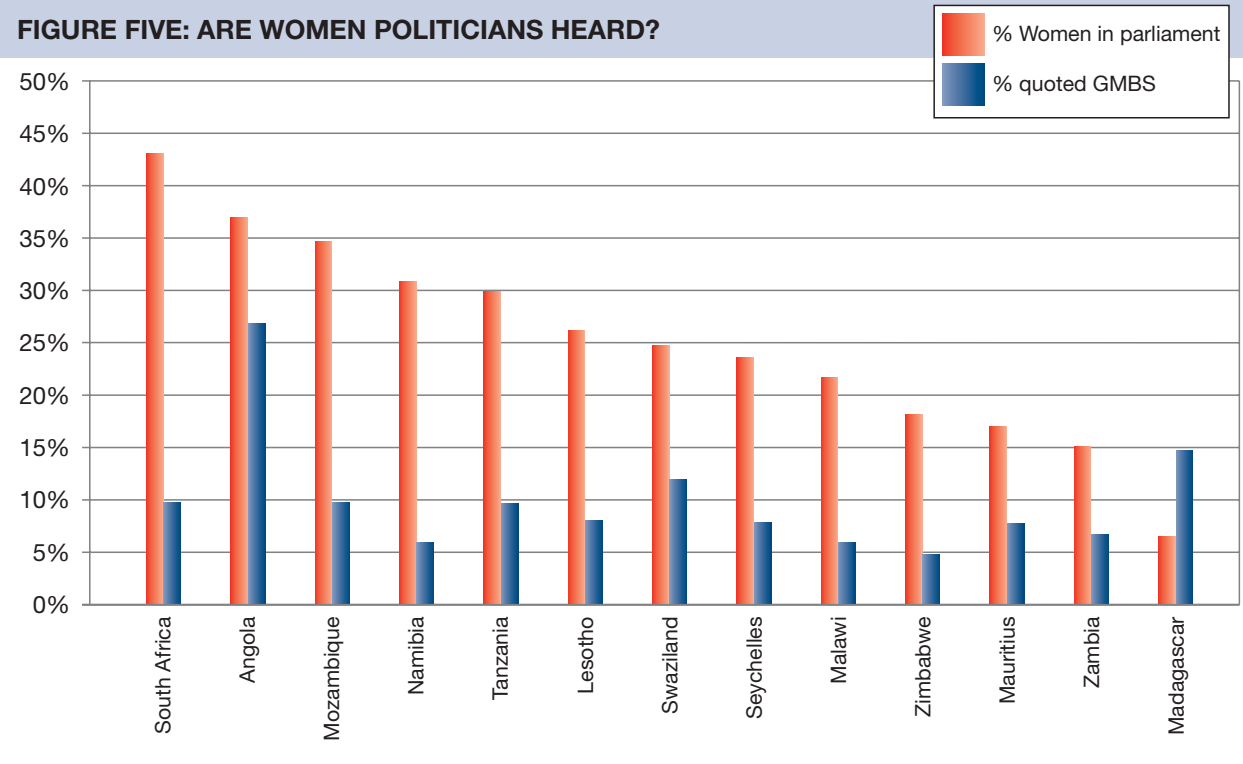
- How are gender roles and assumptions in society reflected in the media?
- Does the media mirror reality?
- The statistics of women's voices of the *Gender and Media Baseline Study* was shared and discussed. It was also explained how media is an important tool to give voice to women and especially to promote gender issues including politics.



Political stories in the media. ***Photo: Loga Virahsawmy***

Figure Five shows the extent to which women's views and voices were heard on political topics in the 2003 *Gender and Media Baseline Study* (GMBS) versus the extent to which women are represented in parliament.

FIGURE FIVE: ARE WOMEN POLITICIANS HEARD?





LE MATINAL, MARDI 20 AVRIL 2010

Mirella Chauvin : "Paul Bérenger a insulté la femme mauricienne"

ELECTION 2010

JENNA RAMOO
Pailles, 19 avril

MIRELLA CHAUVIN se dit très choquée par les propos avancés par le leader de l'Alliance du coeur à l'égard des 13 candidates de l'Alliance de l'avenir lors d'un rassemblement. "Paul Bérenger ine dire qui les 13 candidates de l'Alliance de l'avenir pou al mort dans l'abattoir", a-t-elle avancé, lundi, à un point de presse au centre Swami Vivekananda.

Pour elle, c'est une "insulte envers la femme mauricienne". Outrée par cette insinuation qu'elle qualifie de "très mauvais goût", elle dit s'interroger sur "la crédibilité de Paul Bérenger en ce qui concerne le respect, la compétence et le dévouement des femmes sur le plan politique".

Ainsi pour contrecarrer la déclaration du leader de l'opposition , elle explique que "la présence des 13 femmes aux législatives montre la confiance de Navin Ramgoolam qui atteint son objectif d'avoir plus de femmes participant aux élections".

De plus, Mirella Chauvin avance que la déception de Paul Bérenger dans la circonscription no 19 est palpable car l'alliance bleu-blanc-rouge est confiante d'une victoire écrasante le 5 mai.

Aussi présente au point de presse, Sheila Bappoo a parlé de l'ambiance lors de la mobilisation des milliers de femmes dimanche pour soutenir les 13 candidates pour les élections. "Les 13 candidates représentent les femmes de différentes composantes de la société mauricienne", estime-t-elle.

Par ailleurs, Danielle Turner a montré son appréciation sur la volonté du leader du PTr-MSM-PMSD en faveur du bien-être des minorités. "Blablabla pas intéresse nou, rézilta concret ki bisin, ek Navin Ramgoolam finn donne ene démonstration formidable quand linn dire la langue créole pou rente dans lékol".

Stereotypes and language used during the elections

Participants were given a press cutting to discuss the language used by the leader of a main political alliance (Heart Alliance). Paul Berenger said that all women fielded by the Alliance of the Future headed by Prime Minister were being sent to the slaughterhouse as they will not be elected. Women of the Alliance of the Future took exception to this "crude and vulgar" language and called a press conference. Journalists also sought the views of gender activists who condemned this kind of language.

Questions were raised about inappropriate language used only towards women and not men and how it is important for women to be able to engage with the media.

Planning for a press conference and writing press releases

A session was conducted on how to engage with the media and the different avenues and approaches to deal with the media, what to expect, how to communicate with the press, how to send letters of complaints, letters to the editors, marketing, profiling, coverage of press conferences, sending press release.

The following were explained in details:

- How to write a letter of complaint.
- Writing a press release.
- Building relationships and confidence with the media.
- Making news valuable and reader-friendly.
- How to connect journalists with those who are prepared to talk to the media on topical issues.
- How to make information newsworthy.
- The human dimension of news.
- The appropriate use of language.

Group work

Participants were invited to work in groups to:

- Analyse the number of articles on politics as compared to the rest of the newspapers.
- Compare the voices of women and men.
- Compare images of women as compared to the pictures of men.
- Highlight the subtle and blatant stereotypes.

Participants were also invited to comment on an opinion and commentary article by Gender Links written after the 2005 General Elections to encourage them to write Opinion and Commentary articles.



Mauritian media pays attention to women in politics training.

Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

Mauritius turns a new page
By Loga Virahsawmy

The excitement of general elections with all its flimflams is over.

Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam and his team represent a new look legislature with 12 women, as opposed to the four in the previous government. Of the 16 women fielded by the two major alliances 11 were elected and one nominated as best loser. This is indeed a major increase, although not enough to meet the SADC target of 30%. With the gain of 11.4%, from 5.7% to 17%, Mauritius moves from the last position of women in politics in the SADC to the 6th position coming close to Botswana.

One woman, Kalyanee Virahsawmy made history. She came first in a constituency that was dominated by the Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM) for the last 30 years. She left the rest of her two fellow candidates far behind and was followed by two MMM candidates, one of whom, Joe Lesjongard, a former Minister of Lands. Virahsawmy revealed to me on how tough this achievement was: "Women are close to the people. We are honest and we do not have to bribe people to get votes. I will be the first Member of the Legislative Assembly to represent the Labour Party in the Port Louis-North-Longue Mountain constituency after 30 long years. While my supporters, especially women have all been fantastic, the attitudes of the male opponents have been horrible. The vulgar and grotesque caricatures and posters distributed on me were unbelievable. They fabricated another side of my private life and made it public. This is why women hesitate to go into politics. I dedicate my victory to the women and the people of Mauritius."

Apart from Leela Devi Dookun, former Minister of Arts and Culture, Françoise Labelle, Fazila Daureeawoo and Nita Deeparlsing, the other women came either first or second. This is a clear indication that women did their campaign really well and have been accepted by the general public.

Sheila Bappoo, veteran politician succeeded in her impossible mission to win in an MMM constituency. She managed to sqeeze herself right in the middle of two MMM/MSM candidates. The first being the former Minister of Agriculture, Nando Bodha and the third, a former Principal Parliament Secretary, Francoise Labelle.

Was it not the same Nando Bodha who said at Media Watch Organisation/Gender Links workshop on Gender, Media and Elections held on 14th February 2005 at Le St. Geroges Hotel that "putting a greater number of women as candidates will not guarantee that they will be elected?" The results of the 2005 elections have proved the former Minister of Agriculture wrong.

Women do get elected! With proper lobbying and education women do get the message. Both Media Watch Organisation and Gender Links started this campaign when the book ringing up the Changes was launched in Parliament in May 2004. Women started to become active participants in the electoral process since that day.

While the former Minister of Arts and Culture won a third place, her two fellow male candidates both former Ministers, lost in the process. This is another proof that women are really good in the field.

Political parties have a major role to play in increasing women's representation for the 2010 general elections. The electoral manifesto of the Labour Party highlights electoral reform. Gender activists and other stakeholders must see to it that the new Prime Minister keeps his promise. It is only then that we will be able to talk of gender democracy.

Although Dr. Navin Ramgoolam has officially announced that he will reduce the number of Ministers from 24 to 19, it will be interesting to know how many women he will appoint as Ministers. And why not a woman as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly? We recently had the visit of Madam Speaker Nthoi Motsamai who headed the SADC Parliamentary Forum Election Observer Mission in Mauritius. She is a good role model.

We were told that Leela Devi Dookhun did a fantastic job as Campaign Manager for the MSM. We, therefore, had every reason to believe that she would be nominated as Leader of the Opposition. Her chance should have been even stronger with 8 women on a total of 24 in the opposition without mentioning that her Leader and former Vice-Prime Minister lost his seat. But former Prime Minister Paul Raymond Berenger could not walk the talk of gender equality and justice and is now Leader of the Opposition.

Loga Virahsawmy is the President of Media Watch Organisation in Mauritius. This article is part of the Gender Links Opinion and Commentary Service that provides fresh views on everyday news.

Analysis of women in each constituency

A giant map of all constituencies of Mauritius was placed on the wall. All participants were given cards with the names of candidates. They were then invited to place the cards on the map according to each constituency and to spell out the names of the women candidates and which constituency they represented.

A discussion took place on whether the women were sent to safe constituencies and how many would be elected. Of the 21 women fielded by the two major alliances, the forecast was that only 13 women will be elected; an increase of only one woman.

Leadership score card

Participants were invited to fill the leadership score card of the leaders of both the Heart Alliance and the Alliance of the Future.

Some of the points raised in the evaluation form are as follows:

- You must continue to empower women to stand up and make their voices heard.
- Empower citizens to be able to be critical towards the media.
- Being journalists we have acquired further knowledge to analyse, write and report articles. We can write from a gender perspective.
- The film At the *Coal face* and the debate that followed was excellent.
- Would welcome more workshops of this nature
- Analysis of the media.
- Preconceived ideas on politics have been debunked.
- Key issues around gender and elections.
- How to voice our opinion and write press releases.

At the end of this session a press release was drafted and sent out to the media.



Ameenah Sorefan discusses the constituency map.

Photo: Loga Virahsawmy

COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE DE GENDER LINKS ET DE LA SOCIETE CIVILE

Quatre-Bornes. 22 avril 2010.

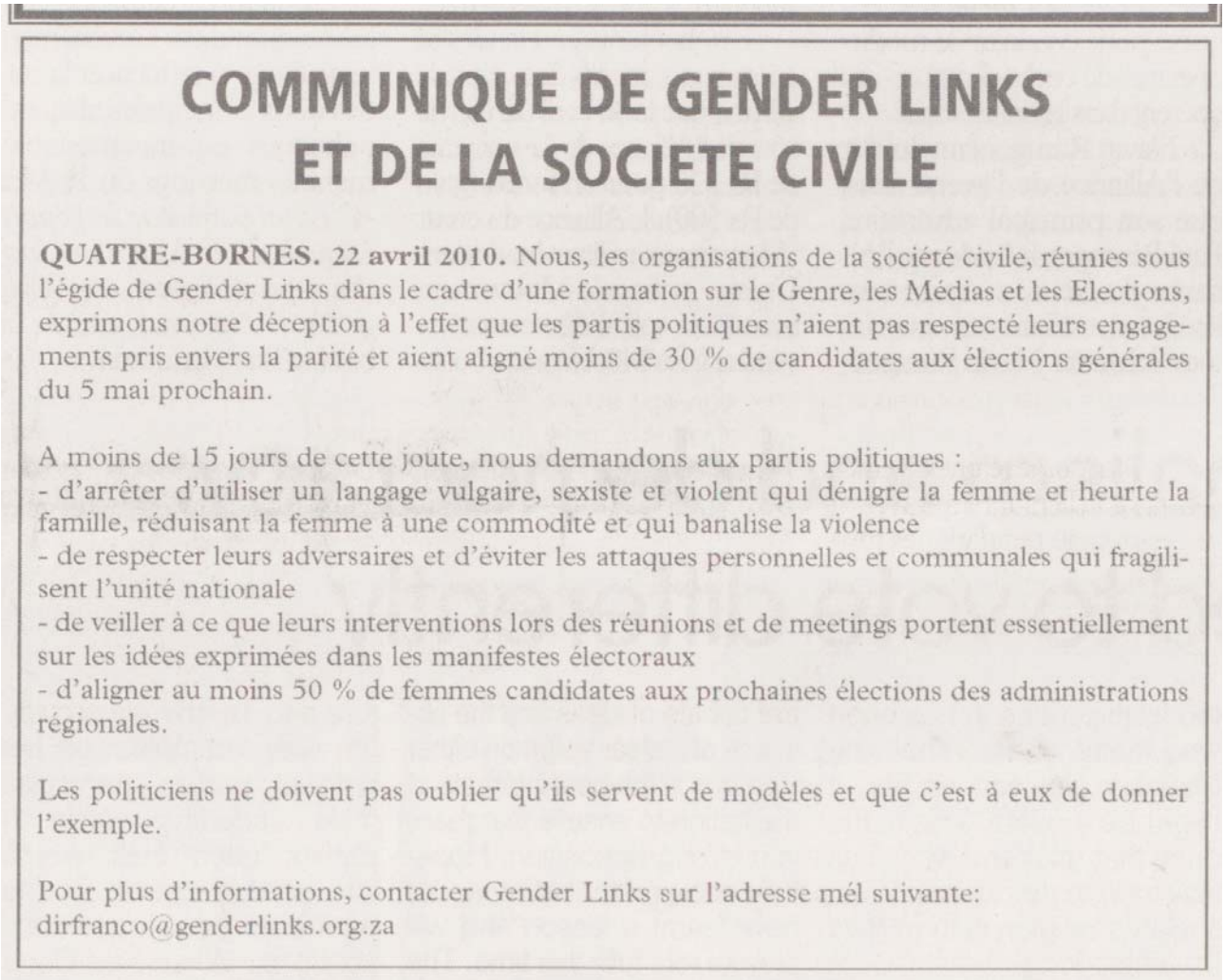
Nous, les organisations de la société civile, réunies sous l'égide de Gender Links dans le cadre d'une formation sur le Genre, les Medias et les Elections, exprimons notre déception a l'effet que les partis politiques n'aient pas respecte leurs engagements pris envers la parité et aient aligne moins de 30% de candidates aux élections générales du 5 mai prochain.

A moins de 15 jours de cette joute, nous demandons aux partis politiques:

- d'arrêter d'utiliser un langage vulgaire, sexiste et violent qui dénigre la femme et heurte la famille, réduisant la femme a une commodité et qui banalise la violence
- de respecter leurs adversaires et d'éviter les attaques personnelles et communales qui fragilisent l'unité nationale
- de veiller à ce que leurs interventions lors des réunions et de meetings portent essentiellement sur les idées exprimées dans les manifestes électoraux
- d'aligner au moins 50% de femmes candidates aux prochaines élections des administrations régionales

Les politiciens ne doivent pas oublier qu'ils servent de modèles et que c'est à eux de donner l'exemple.

Pour plus d'informations, contactez Gender Links sur l'adresse mel suivante: dirfranco@genderlinks.org.za



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ET DE LA SOCIETE CIVILE

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3 gender audit of the elections



Political rally of the Labour Party. ***Photo: L'Express***

This section of the report covers the conduct and outcomes of the elections from a gender perspective, including voting, candidates, and the elections themselves.

Voters

The 2010 Mauritian General Elections was preceded by a successful registration exercise where 875 799 voters registered to vote. Only 684 768 voted. This constitutes a 77.8% turn out on during the elections. The Mauritius Electoral Commission stated that 51% women voted in the election but only 21.6% women were fielded as candidates.

TABLE ONE: STATISTICS ON VOTER REGISTERS, 2010

Constituency no.	Constituency name	No. of voters
1	Grand River North West and Port Louis West	40 241
2	Port Louis South and Port Louis Central	24 463
3	Port Louis Maritime and Port Louis East	22 428
4	Port Louis North and Montagne Longue	45 986
5	Pamplemousses and Triolet	56 429
6	Grand Baie and Poudre d'Or	48 115
7	Piton and Riviere du Rempart	40 379
8	Quartier Militaire and Moka	41 223
9	Flacq and Bon Accueil	50 612
10	Montagne Blanche and Grand River South East	47 073
11	Vieux Grand Port and Rose Belle	39 360
12	Mahebourg and Plaine Magnien	36 136
13	Riviere des Anguilles and Souillac	33 081
14	Savanne and Black River	57 960
15	La Caverne and Phoenix	53 394
16	Vacoas and Floreal	43 816
17	Curepipe and Midlands	45 085
18	Belle Rose and Quatre Bornes	42 072
19	Stanley and Rose Hill	38 748
20	Beau Bassin and Petite Riviere	42 375
21	Rodrigues	26 823
TOTAL		**875 799**

Quotas

The constitution of Mauritius makes no provision for quotas to ensure women's representation in publicly elected bodies at any level. One political party in Mauritius, the Mouvement Militant Mauricien, has a quota of at least 20% for women to stand as candidates in their constitution but the party has never adhered to the provision.

Mauritius is signatory to a number of regional and international gender instruments that provide the basis for the increased or equal representation and participation of women in decision-making positions. These include the 2005 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA).

Table Two shows that a total of 14 women stood as candidates in eight constituencies.

TABLE TWO: FEMALE CANDIDATES BY CONSTITUENCY

Constituency	No of Voters	Name	No of Votes	% of Votes	Rank
1 - GRNO-Port Louis	29 383	Arianne Navarre	15 834	53.81%	1
4 – PL North – M. Longue	34 434	Mireille Martin	16 607	48.2%	1
		Kalyanee Juggoo	15 803	45.8%	3
7-Piton/RivdRem	32 379	Pratibha Bholah	19 173	57.2%	1
8-Moka/Q.Militaire	34 349	Leela Dokhun	19 109	55.6%	2
14-Savanne/R.Noire	45 396	Maya Hanoomanjee	23 356	51.4%	2
16 – Vocoas/Floreal	34 166	Sheila Bappoo	16 695	48.8%	2
18 – BR/QB	32 473	Francoise Labelle	16 574	48.5%	3
		Nita Deerpalsing	16 122	49.6%	3
19-Stanley/RH	29 236	Lysie Ribot	15 476	52.9%	3
TOTAL					**10**

Gender analysis of party manifestos

Political parties released their manifestos on the eve of the elections. An analysis of the manifestos found that the major election issues were improving the lives of the people in the field of:

- Health
- Security
- Agriculture
- Infrastructure
- Education
- Housing
- Justice, and to
- Combat crime

The manifestos fell short of mainstreaming gender, promoting gender equality, and enhancing the status of women. There was little reference to the promotion of gender equality and participation of women in leadership positions. Political parties that mentioned gender did so in a vague way. Some parties did not feature gender at all in their manifestos. Below is a detailed analysis of gender in party manifestos.



Sheila Bapoo, Minister of Gender Equality and Nita Deerpalsing, a member of parliament, at a Women in Politics workshop.
Photo: Loga Virahsawmy

TABLE THREE: GENDER ANALYSIS OF PARTY MANIFESTOS

PARTY	CONSTI-TUTION	GENDER SPECIFIC REFERENCES IN MANIFESTOS	GENDER MAINSTREAMED IN MANIFESTOS
The Alliance of the Future	30% women in decision making at party level	• Technical support in each Ministry to put in place a Sectoral Gender Policies • Research Centre on Gender Issues • Clusters for women entrepreneur in different fields • Family Theme Park • Regional Creativity Centre • Consolidated Children Bill • Kindergarten for children as from three months old to allow mothers to work • Home based Care • Creation of a Ministry of Social Integration • Empowerment of poor people • A laptop for all Lower VI students • Food Security • The elderly • Sensitisation campaigns to prevent GBV • Infrastructure so that women can be economically independent • Institute for the health and well-being of women	• Democratisation of the economy • Access to land • A nation of entrepreneur • Empowerment of citizens to fight against poverty • Construction of houses • Online Library • Food Security • New rules under the Occupational safety Act • Decent work country programme • Capacity building of the public sector • Security of citizens • New Police Act • Victims Rights Act • Crime Control Commission • Bail Act • Independent Police Complaints Bureau • Maintain universal pensions • Break the chains of poverty • Training of people with disabilities • New centres of recreation • Home based care • New infrastructure for sports • Integrated strategic plan for sports • Reinforcing the concept of sports for fun • Launch of a National Institute for Sports • Review the problems of indiscipline at school • Use of Creole Language • Review of financial assistance in regard to examinations fees for SC and HSC • Access of handicapped children to school • All schools will be equipped with e-learning • Schools must be closer to students • Regional poles for access to tertiary education

PARTY	CONSTI-TUTION	GENDER SPECIFIC REFERENCES IN MANIFESTOS	GENDER MAINSTREAMED IN MANIFESTOS
			• Free internet • National Civic Education for the young • Artist Welfare Fund • National Award for Excellence in Arts • Mauritian Festival • Assistance to Artists • Developmental school for artists • Cinema school
The Alliance of the Heart	At least 20% women must be fielded as candidates	• Eradicate discrimination against women • Legislation to have one seat for woman in each constituency for the National Assembly and one third of seats for localities • Electoral reform including PR • An independent commission to look at all laws and implementation of laws that discriminate women • An aggressive action to combat domestic violence • Half way home for women • Special unit at the police to listen to women • Housing • Women's health • Equal salary for equal pay • Feminine Entrepreneurship • High Monitoring Committee for Gender Policy • Promoting women's health	• Protection of consumers • Food security • Small Scale Industries • Cooperatives and handicrafts • Fight against poverty • Social protection • Education and the protection of children • Public health • Housing • Sports for all • Democratisation of culture

The analysis above shows that both Alliances made a real effort to mainstream gender in their manifestos. The manifestos did not have any influence on voters as the manifestos came out late and were distributed only as a supplement in newspapers.

While the Heart Alliance has Proportional Representation and 30% women candidates in its manifesto, it lacks gender specific issues. The Alliance of the Future, on the other hand, does not make provision for percentage of women to be fielded as candidates but breaks new ground with its gender specific projects.

The creation of a Ministry of Social Integration, a Research Centre on gender issues, home based care and an Institute for the Health of women are groundbreaking projects by the Social Alliance are great ideas but must now be translated into action. Both manifestos dwelled on providing solutions to the problems of the environment, building houses and homes, poverty and sustainable energy. Provisions are also made in both manifestos for the empowerment of women and entrepreneurship.

Candidate and voter information

Sensitisation of the public regarding house to house enquiries, registration of voters and elections is effected by the Electoral Commissioner at appropriate times, by means of press releases, communiqués, radio spots and TV, notices and posters.

A few days before elections, Returning Officers hold meetings with candidates regarding election matters and the roles and responsibilities of candidates and agents.

Notices and instructions to voters are affixed in all Polling Stations on Poll Day for the guidance of voters.

Electoral process

Mauritius is a sovereign democratic state, with a President as the Head of the state and its electoral system is based on the FPTP system.

The present National Assembly comprises 62 elected members (the 20 Constituencies of Mauritius returning three members each whilst Rodrigues, the 21st constituency, returns two members). Furthermore, constituencies are allocated to non-elected party candidates in order to ensure a fair and adequate representation of each community and party in the Assembly.

The Constitution of Mauritius sets out the management structure for the organisation and conduct of elections. It also provides for the delimitation of constituencies and the review thereof every 10 years or whenever the need arises.

The Representation of the People Act, the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act, the Local Government Act and Regulations governing the National Assembly, Rodrigues Regional Assembly, Local Government Council Elections are, inter alia, the principal instruments governing the organisation and conduct of elections.

The General Elections are held every five years. The last General Elections were held in May 2010. The Municipal elections were held in October in 2005 and Village Elections in November 2005.

Election outcomes

SADC and the African Union observers were in Mauritius to provide an independent view on the elections. The 130 observers, both female and male, were in all voting centres. The Chief of Delegation of the SADC Parliamentary Forum and Deputy Speaker of the Angolan National Assembly, Joao Lourenco, told the media: “Our impression is that the electoral process is very peaceful. Everything is well organised and we hope that the Mauritian people will choose the best coalition to rule the country for the next five years. It is a very good thing for the spirit of democracy. Unfortunately, it is not usual to see that political environment during election period in certain countries in our continent of Africa. Our mission is to hear; to observe the electoral process, to make contact with the local stakeholders to see how things are going, to observe the events on polling day and on counting day.”



SADC Observers

Photo: Mary Coopan

A delegation of over 20 members of the SADC mission met with the Director of Gender Links (Mauritius and Francophone). They wanted to know more about Gender Links and GL views on the media coverage of elections. The Director of the GL Satellite Office was also invited by MACOSS (Mauritius Council of Social Services), the umbrella organisation of all NGOs in Mauritius and the SADC CNGO to present a paper on the media and elections for members of the SADC Electoral Observatory Mission.

There was no violence or loss of life due to elections. The SADC delegation praised Mauritius for the peaceful election environment which they said is a model in the region.

According to random monitoring done by Gender Links on gender and media coverage, women got a fair deal. Quite a few women candidates, both known and unknown, got media coverage. The MBC television gave air time to all political parties and women were well represented.



Les observateurs qualifient les élections de « free and fair »



Défi Quotidien - Mardi 20 avril 2010 6

L'Alliance du Cœur à Curepipe

« Une femme dans chaque circonscription en 2015 »

C'est avec des pétarades que les Curepipiens ont accueilli le leader du Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM), Paul Bérenger, lors du meeting de l'Alliance du Cœur à Curepipe. Il a réclamé, par boutade, un 4-0 au lieu d'un 3-0 au No 17, tellement il est confiant de la grande force de l'Alliance du Coeur dans la circonscription.

Profitant du fait que le meeting se faisait non loin de la Place de taxis à la rue Chasteauneuf, Curepipe, le leader de MMM a annoncé que les chauffeurs de taxi pourront bénéficier d'une voiture 100 % Duty Free et échanger de voiture plus régulièrement. Il s'est moqué de certains projets émis dans le manifeste électoral de l'Alliance de l'Avenir, dont l'abolition de la taxe sur les résidences et l'enlèvement des subsides sur les frais d'examens pour les étudiants de la SC et HSC. Il a traité ce manifeste de «certificat d'incompétence». Il a fait ressortir que de son côté l'Alliance MMM/UN/MMSD va maintenir les subsides sur les frais d'examens pour les étudiants du SC et du HSC, paiera 50% des frais examens pour chaque étudiant et remboursera les frais d'examens déjà payés. Paul Bérenger a de nouveau évoqué le cas de Rama Sithanen pour décrier la mauvaise façon de faire de Navin Ramgoolam. «*Ou pas traite dimoune comme sa*», déclare-t-il. Le leader du MMM a expliqué le choix de Ariane Navarre-Marie comme Speaker. Pour lui, c'est une femme qui a fait énormément pour le parti et est aussi un symbole qui démontre que son parti respecte la femme. Pour le leader de MMM, la femme a un rôle primordial dans le pays. C'est la raison pour laquelle son alliance présentera une femme comme candidate dans chaque circonscription aux prochaines législatives. Il a aussi cité le cas de Jyoti Jeetun qui a été mise à la porte par l'actuel gouvernement. Abordant l'incident qui a eu lieu samedi dans cette circonscription, il a demandé que les activistes des deux camps s'entendent pour éviter la violence. Il a aussi dit qu'au cas où il est reconduit au pouvoir, il compte mettre sur pied une commission qui sera présidée par un ancien juge pour enquêter sur le déroulement des législatives. Il a aussi soutenu ceux qui ont entravé la loi payeront les conséquences.

Ariane Lefort

During the electoral campaign both Navin Ramgoolam, leader of the Alliance of the Future and Paul Raymond Berenger, Leader of the Heart Alliance said that they will field more women in 2015. Ramgoolam told men to "pran kont" (be careful) as there might be more women than men in the 2015 general elections while Berenger said "une femme dans chaque circonscription en 2015" (a woman candidate in each constituency in 2015).

The Director of the Francophone Office of Gender Links was invited to comment on the elections on the national television on 6 May. This is the first time that a woman was invited to comment on the election results.



Loga at the MBC on election day.

Photo: MBC

Representation of women in the national parliament

The 2010 Mauritian election results show that the representation of women in the national parliament is now 18.8% as compared to 17.1%, a mere 1.7% change.

Table Four shows that 13 women will be in Parliament, an increase of 2%. Only 10 women were elected directly into parliament and three made their way through the "best loser" system.

TABLE FOUR: NUMBER OF WOMEN CANDIDATES FIELDED BY THE MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES

Party	Total no. of women fielded	%women overall On total of 60 candidates	Elected female candidates	% of women	Best Loser	Total No of women in Parliament
Alliance of PTr/MSM/ PMSD	13	21.6%	7	11.6%	2	9
MMM/UN/ MMSD.	8	13.3%	3	5%	1	4
Grand Total	21	35%	10	16.6%	3	13



IT session at the Women in Politics workshop.

Photo: Loga Virahsawmy



Participants at the Women in Politics workshop.

Photo: Marie-Annick Savripéne

Where are the women?

FIGURE SIX: WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?

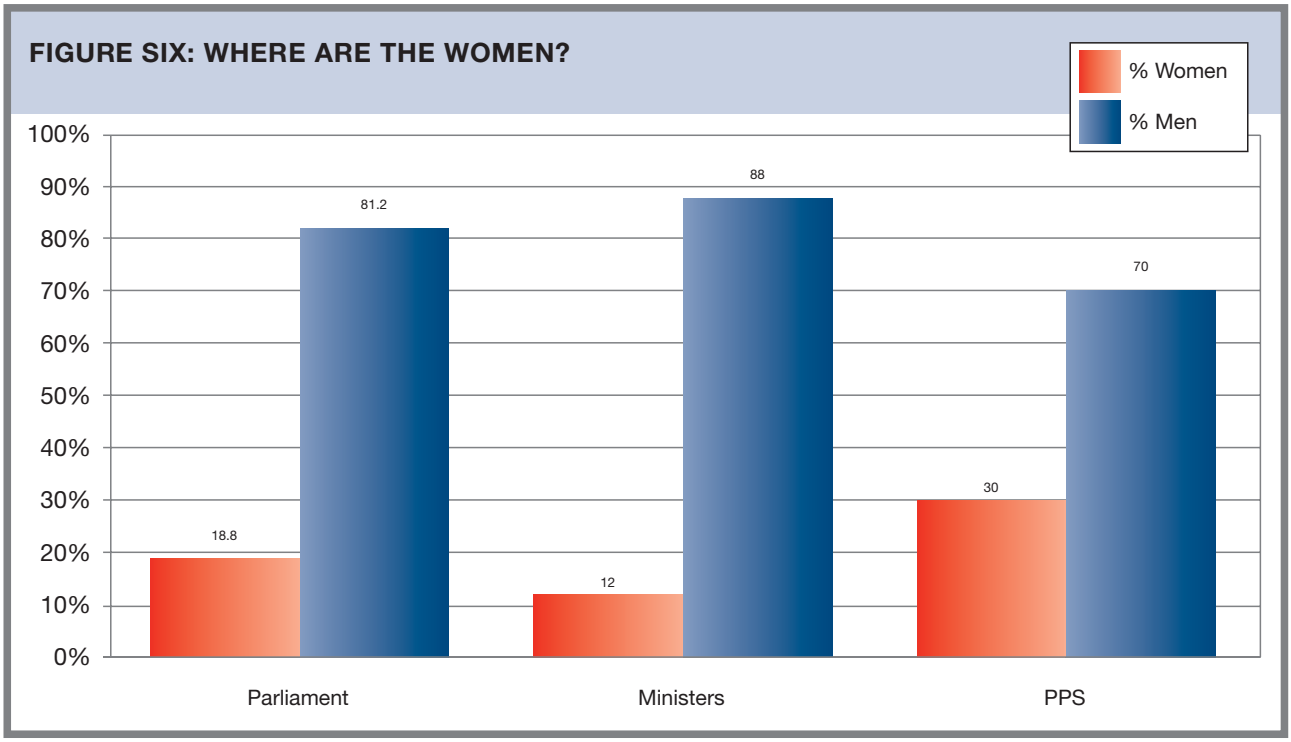


Figure Six shows that there are 30% women as Private Parliamentary Secretaries (PPS) which are equivalent to Junior Ministers. The representation of women in parliament and as ministers is very low at 18.8% and 12% respectively.

TABLE FIVE: REGIONAL RANKING OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

Rank	Country	% Women in lower or single house
1	South Africa	41.0%
2	Angola	37.3%
3	Mozambique	34.8%
4	Tanzania	30.4%
5	Namibia	24.0 %
6	Lesotho	25%
7	Seychelles	23.5%
8	Malawi	20.5%
9	Mauritius	18.8 %
10	Zimbabwe	16%
11	Zambia	15.2%
12	Swaziland	13.8%
13	Madagascar	10.3%
14	DRC	8.4%
15	Botswana	7.9%

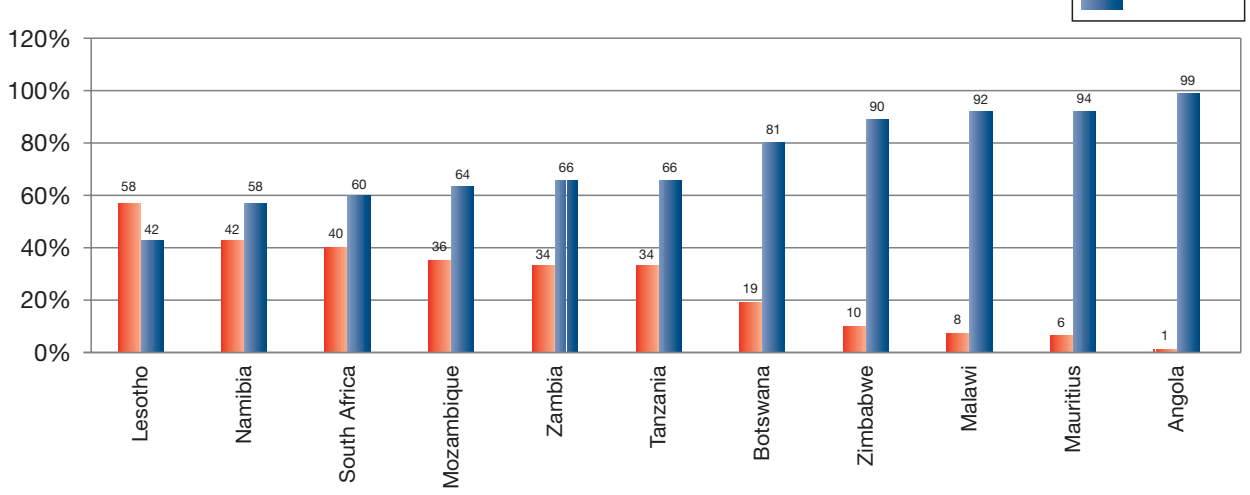
Mauritius is ranked ninth of the 15 countries in SADC.



Labour Party meeting with the youth of Mauritius.
Photo: L'Express

Local government

FIGURE SEVEN: PROPORTION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT



At 6.4% Mauritius has amongst the lowest proportions of women in local government in the region.

4 gender, media and the elections



SADC Observer mission interviewing Loga Virahsawmy. ***Photo: Gareth White***

In the run up to the elections, Gender Links held a gender, media and elections workshop in Mauritius with a view to imparting gender aware skills to media practitioners so that the voices of women are equally heard. Several media houses attended the workshop.

In order to gauge whether media houses are covering stories from a gender angle, there is a need to monitor the media. Media monitoring is a useful tool to assess whether gender reporting skills are internalised and being used by media houses. Election reporting offers the best opportunity to assess whether the voices of women and men are captured in reports and whether journalists are able to pick gender from election issues or stories.

Aim

- To establish the extent to which media houses are mainstreaming gender in their election coverage before, during and after elections.
- To act as feedback on the effectiveness of the training.

Timeframe

The monitoring was done from 13 April to 23 May 2010. The time frame covers the pre, during and post elections.

Methodology

The methodology consisted of
- Monitoring of both print and broadcast media.
- Monitoring of election stories from a gender perspective for print and broadcast media.
- Data capture on a database.

Monitoring team

The monitoring was led by Gareth White, former Country Facilitator of MWO-GEMSA, who conducted the monitoring together with Carla Prayag, former intern of the Mauritian Satellite Office. Lukhanyo Nyati of Ukhanyo Research and Consulting undertook the data analysis.

Topics monitored

A total 1656 items were monitored for seven media outlets, namely *L'Express*, *La Vie Catholique*, *Le Mauricien*, *MBC Radio*, *MBC Television*, *Radio Plus* and *Week End*. A wide range of topics were analysed including party candidates, election outcomes, election procedures, campaigning, voting, mudslinging, gender, the Independent Electoral Commission, Economics, party manifestos, scandals, health, fraud, contestations, violence, opinion polls, election funding, corruption, gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS. For the broadcast media, only news was monitored.

Key findings

- Women voices constituted 17% of the total number of sources during the monitoring period compared to 19% in the Mauritius *Gender and Media Progress Study* (GMPS).
- Male voices dominated in nearly all election topics.
- *MBC Radio* had the highest percentage of women sources at 25%.
- Women voices on MBC television were quite low at 17% compared to their performance in the Mauritius GMPS at 28%.
- Most of the reporters in the print media were male, at 67%, and 33% female. The highest proportion of female reporters was in *La Vie Catholique* at 45%. On the other hand presenters were 47% female with the highest at MBC Radio at 94%, and MBC Television at 58%.
- The political party most mentioned in the media is the Social Alliance at 49%.



MMM supporters on election day.
Photo: Loga Virahsawmy

News sources

FIGURE EIGHT: NUMBER OF WOMEN AND MEN SOURCES ACROSS ALL MEDIA MONITORED - MAURITIUS

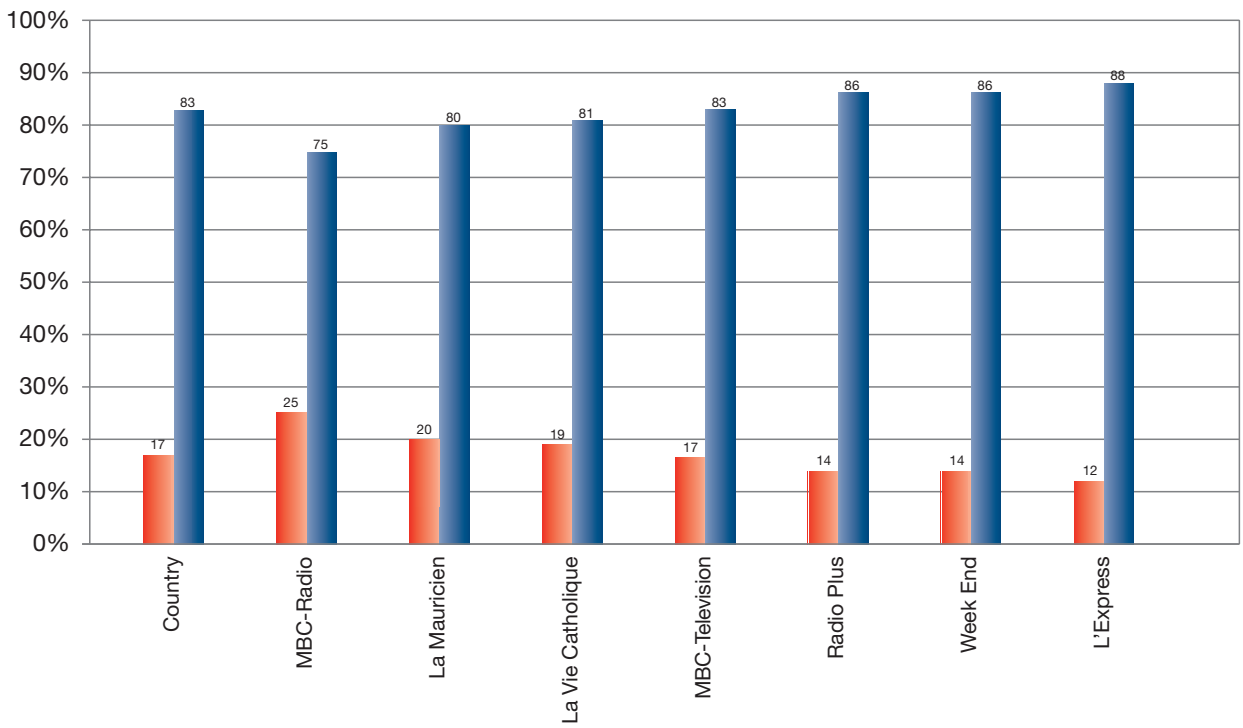


Figure eight shows that the proportion of women sources in the Mauritian election coverage was 17%. *MBC Radio* had the highest percentage of women sources at 25% followed by *Le Mauricien* and *La Vie Catholique* with 20 and 19% respectively.

MBC Television had 17% women sources. All radio stations and the MBC *Television* did lots of special programmes on the elections during the monitoring period but these were not monitored.

The lowest proportion of women's voices was in L'Express at 12%.



Young Labour Party supporters on election day.
Photo: Loga Virahsawmy

Women were seen but not heard in the media

An article published in L'Express of 16 April 2010 on the maneuvers of the Alliance of the Future gives an eye-catching and large size photograph of Sheila Bapoo and Stéphanie Anquetil on the front page. The picture depicts the active role of these two women campaigning for the elections with the caption that Sheila Bappoo (left) and Stéphanie Anquetil launched the Labour Party's headquarter at Allée-Brillant.

Despite being very much present in the picture these two women are completely absent in the article. Their voices have been completely silenced.

This unsigned article could have been written from anywhere and sent by e-mail with any eye-catching picture put in the article. Activities of male and female politicians are mentioned without them being heard. The article also highlights that the Electoral Supervisory Commission has come out with its Code of Ethics for the election but there is no fact box to show this Code of Ethics.

The piece is a missed opportunity of an in-depth article where the population at large could have had more information on activities of politicians both female and male as well as the Code of Ethics for the elections.



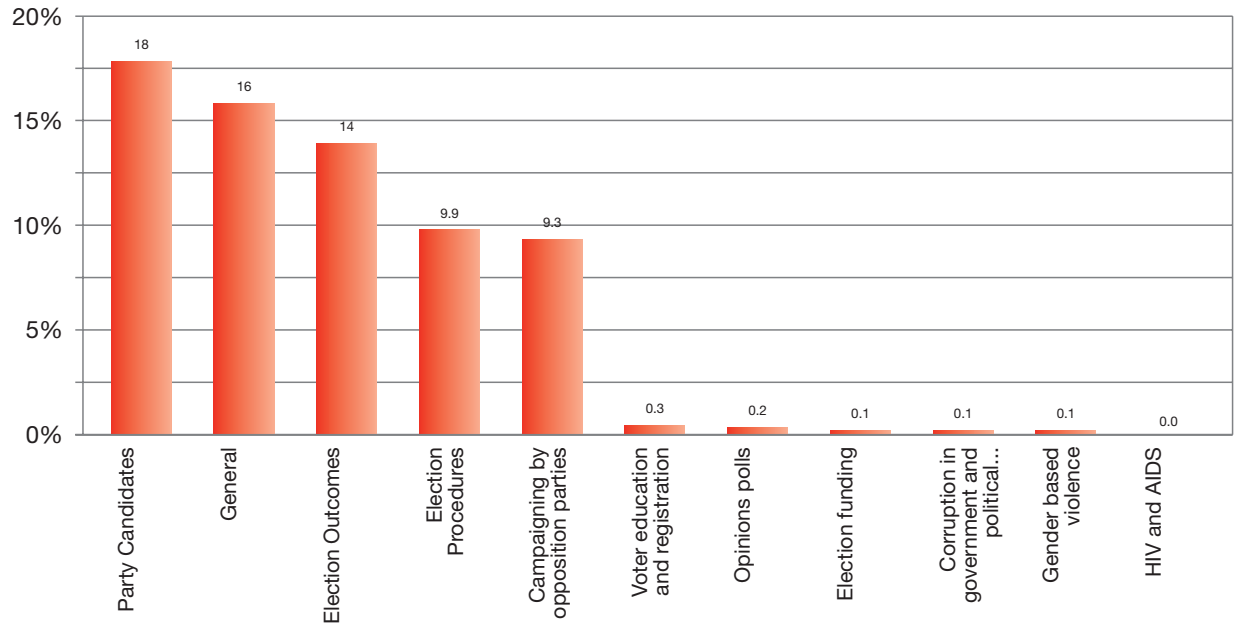
L'Alliance de l'avenir

Les grandes manœuvres

«A Curepipe, les candidats du MMM ont dénoncé la répression dont seraient victimes ses partisans.»

Topics and issues

FIGURE NINE: TOPICS DISCUSSED DURING ELECTIONS - MAURITIUS





8 lundi 26 avril 2010

ICJM | forum-débat cet après-midi

Steve Obeegadoo et Nita Deerpalsing face à face

L'institut Cardinal Jean Margéot (ICJM) veut provoquer un débat sur la pertinence des programmes électoraux des deux principaux blocs par rapport aux enjeux auxquels est confronté le pays. D'où le forum-débat que l'institut organise cet après-midi à la Maison Carné à Rose-Hill. L'Alliance du Cœur a désigné Steve Obeegadoo pour aller convaincre tandis que l'Alliance de l'Avenir sera représentée par Nita Deerpalsing.

Steve Obeegadoo

Nita Deerpalsing

Dans le cadre des prochaines élections, l'Eglise Catholique veut apporter sa contribution pour aider les citoyens mauriciens à voter, dit-elle, de « manière responsable » et encourage ainsi les organisations diocésaines et les paroisses à prendre des initiatives dans cette direction. « L'organisation et le fonctionnement de la société sont l'affaire de tous les citoyens, qu'ils croient en Dieu ou non », souligne l'évêché.

L'ICJM avec la collaboration de la Commission Justice et Paix a invité les deux principaux blocs à ces prochaines élections à dire leur vision de la société mauricienne et présenter les grandes lignes de leur manifeste électoral au cours d'un forum-débat lundi à la Maison Carné à Rose-Hill. Outre l'intervention des représentants de ces deux alliances, les organisateurs ont fait appel à des professionnels qui approfondiront certaines questions clés : économie (Pierre Dinan), démocratie et politique (Lindsay Rivière), social (Jonathan Ravat), éducation (Gilberte Chung et Alain Doolub).

« Il ne s'agira pas d'un face-à-face entre deux politiciens pour les besoins de polémiquer. Nous voulons un débat sérieux et d'un haut niveau sur les enjeux de la société mauricienne et c'est pour cette raison qu'il y aura d'autres intervenants, qui sont des professionnels dans les sujets qu'ils aborderont » expliquent les organisateurs.

Une centaine de personnes, des professionnels du secteur éducatif et de l'économie, ont été invitées à y assister et à participer aux discussions. Cassam Uteem et Karl Offman, deux ex-présidents de la République, y seront aussi présents. La note d'introduction sera faite par Jean-Maurice Labour, le vicaire général, au nom de Mgr Piat qui se trouve en ce moment aux Seychelles pour la Conférence Episcopale de l'océan Indien (CEDOI).

A vendredi dernier, l'alliance Ptr-PMSD-MSM avait désigné Jacques David, activiste du Ptr, au lieu d'un candidat ou d'un dirigeant pour participer à ce forum-débat. Ce choix avait suscité beaucoup de commentaires et une certaine déception tant parmi les organisateurs que les autres intervenants (ICJM) figurant à l'agenda. Selon nos informations, certains milieux de l'Alliance de l'Avenir n'étaient pas non plus d'accord sur l'identité de la personne désignée et n'ont pas manqué de le faire savoir aux dirigeants de cette alliance. Après les contestations, ce matin les organisateurs confirmaient la présence de Nita Deerpalsing.

M.A.

The highest proportion of election stories focused on party candidates (18%). General election topics followed with 16%, election outcomes constituted 14% of coverage while election procedures (9.9%) and campaigning by opposition (9.3%) constituted the remaining top five topics.

Voter education and registration, opinion polls, election funding and corruption in government and political parties received less than 0.3% coverage. Gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS received 0.1 and no coverage respectively. The election coverage focused on election-related topics.

Important issues such as HIV and AIDS and gender-based violence received no coverage. These are important election issues and their absence from the election discourse is problematic. It is important to note that the two major alliances do not have HIV and AIDS in their electoral manifestos.

A few ground breaking articles, for example interviewing both men and women on the same topic instead of only men or only women, were noticed.



2 mardi 20 avril 2010 ÉLECTIONS 2010 le mauricien

NOUVEAU CANDIDAT | Prateebah Bholah, candidate au N°7 :

« SAJ est un modèle pour moi »

Prateebah Bholah, candidate de l'Alliance de l'avenir dans la circonscription Pitton/Rivière-du-Rempart, ne jure que par l'ancien Premier ministre sir Aseroad Jugnauth, président de la République en exercice. « Il est un modèle pour moi. Je l'admire et quand je le regarde, je ressens comme des vibrations. Je ne sais pas trop pourquoi ! Pa ek tou dimoun ki gayn sa », déclare-t-elle.

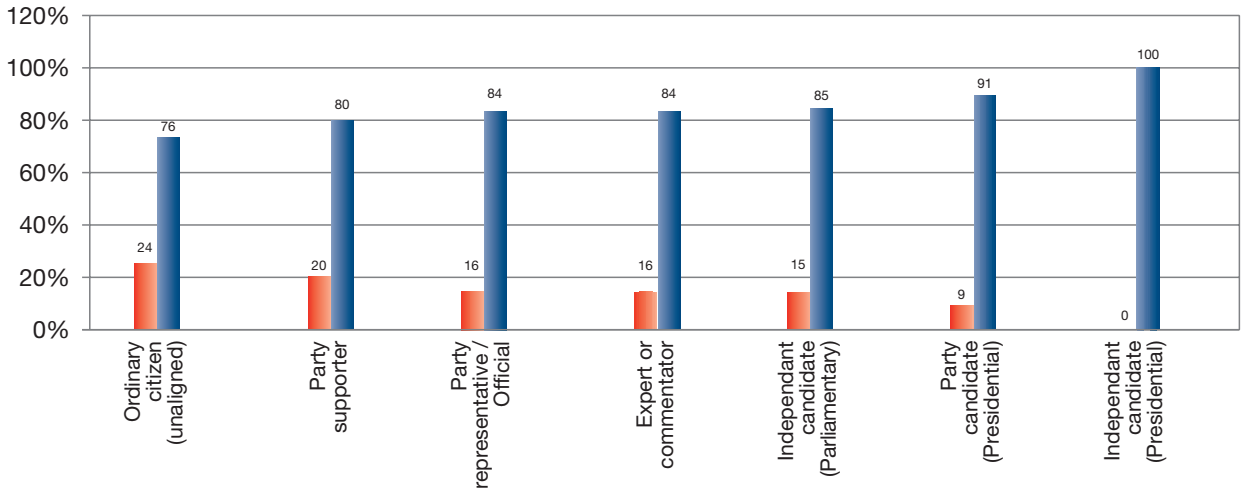
Prateebah Bholah se sent très bien accueillie par les habitants de la circonscription N°7

Nasseem Acharally

Women who stood as candidates for the first time got print coverage/portraits and profiles. Unfortunately most of them were from the two major alliances and not small parties.

Function of each source

FIGURE TEN: FUNCTION OF WOMEN AND MEN ELECTION NEWS SOURCES - MAURITIUS



The majority of the sources in the election coverage in Mauritius were ordinary citizens. This is an important finding. Often the voices of ordinary citizens are absent in election coverage. However, the disappointing finding is that 24% of these were women.

Women were under-represented in all categories. There were no women sources in the category independent candidate. This could be due to an absence of independent female candidates but women could still have commented on lack of representation of women candidates.

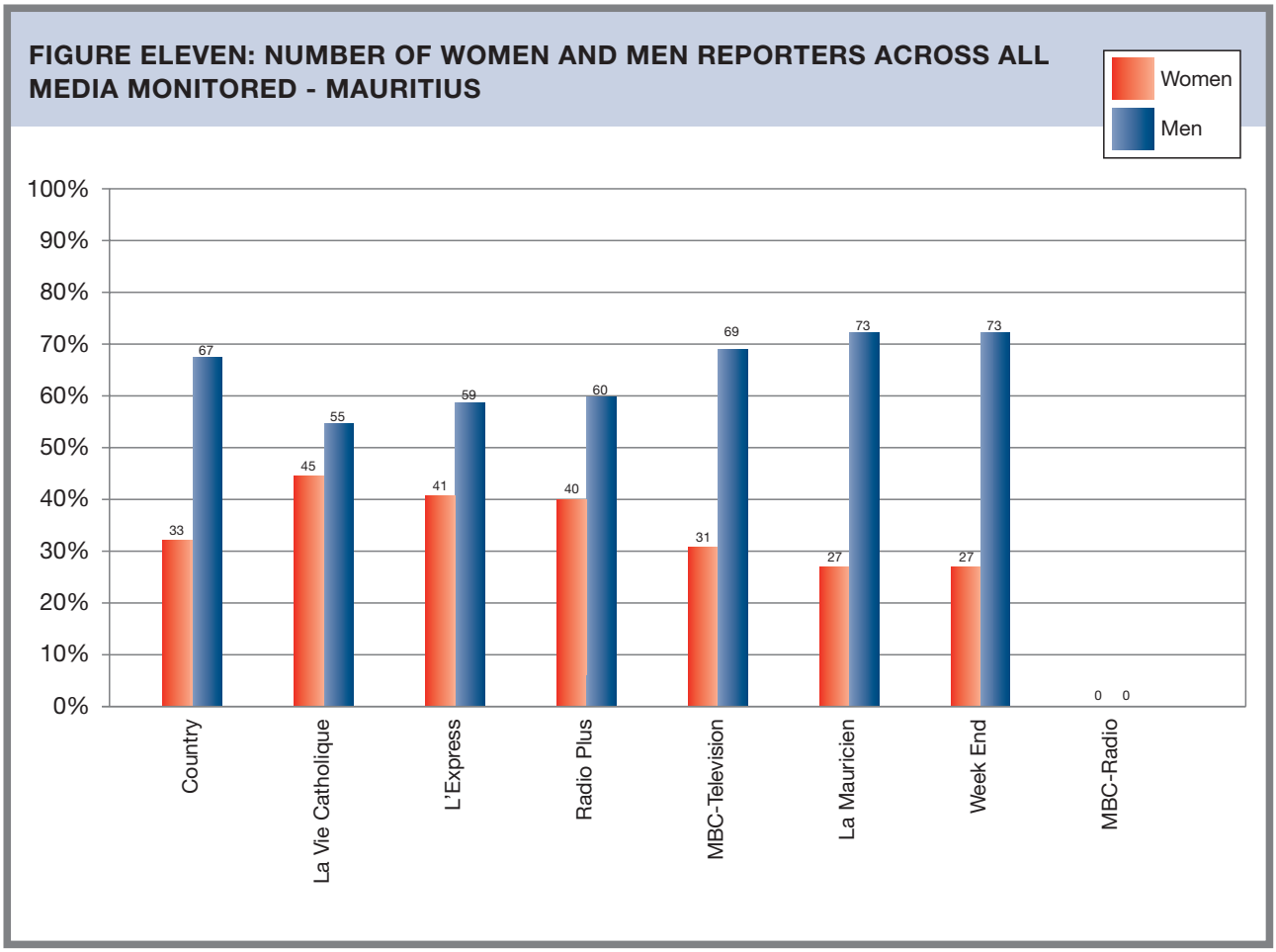


This cartoon targets women and plays on the words “Zot ti pou balye caro” (get it all) but “caro” means sugar cane fields so “zot pou al balye caro” means that the women who stood and did not win would now clean the sugar-cane fields. This cartoon re-inforcres the notion that women should not be involved in public life and are more suited to domestic tasks such as cleaning.

Women and men reporters

The propotion of women covering the election was 33% as opposed to 67% men. The highest proportion of women reporters came from *La Vie Catholique* at 45% followed L'Express (41%) and *Radio Plus* (40%).

FIGURE ELEVEN: NUMBER OF WOMEN AND MEN REPORTERS ACROSS ALL MEDIA MONITORED - MAURITIUS

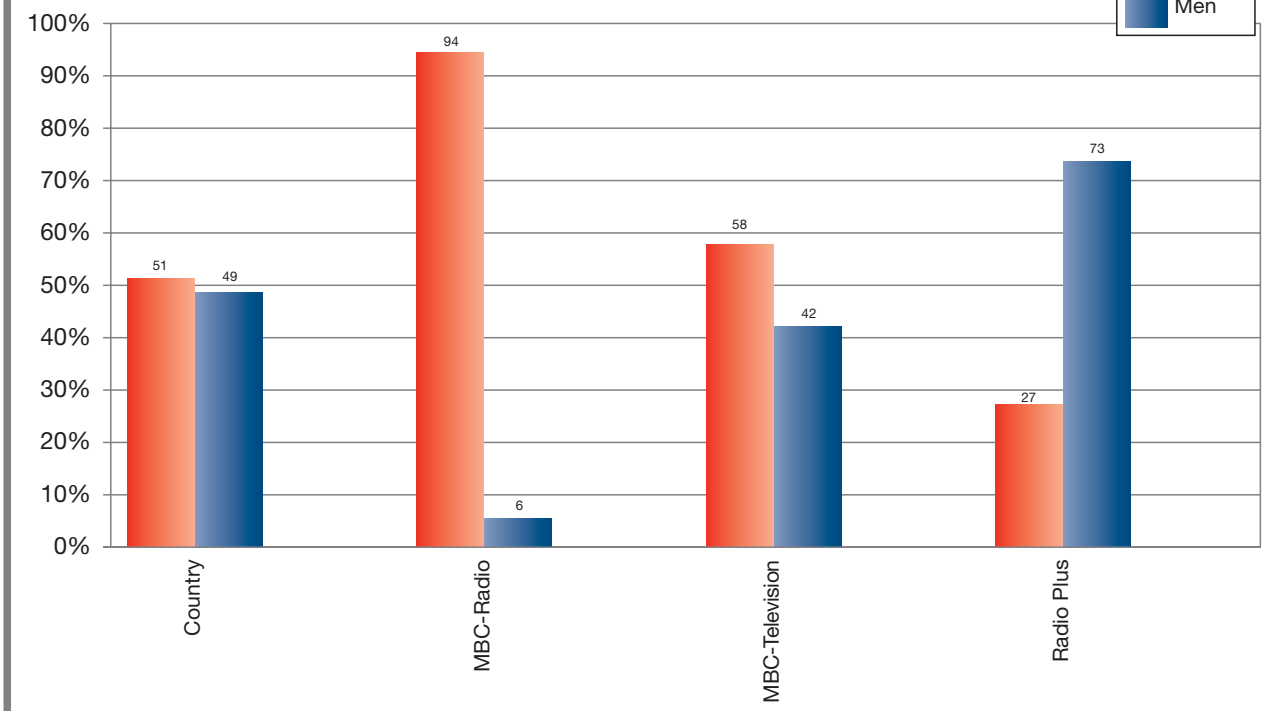


In an unusual finding the monitors did not identify any journalists on *MBC Radio*. This is in all likelihood the monitors' confusion between journalists and presenters.

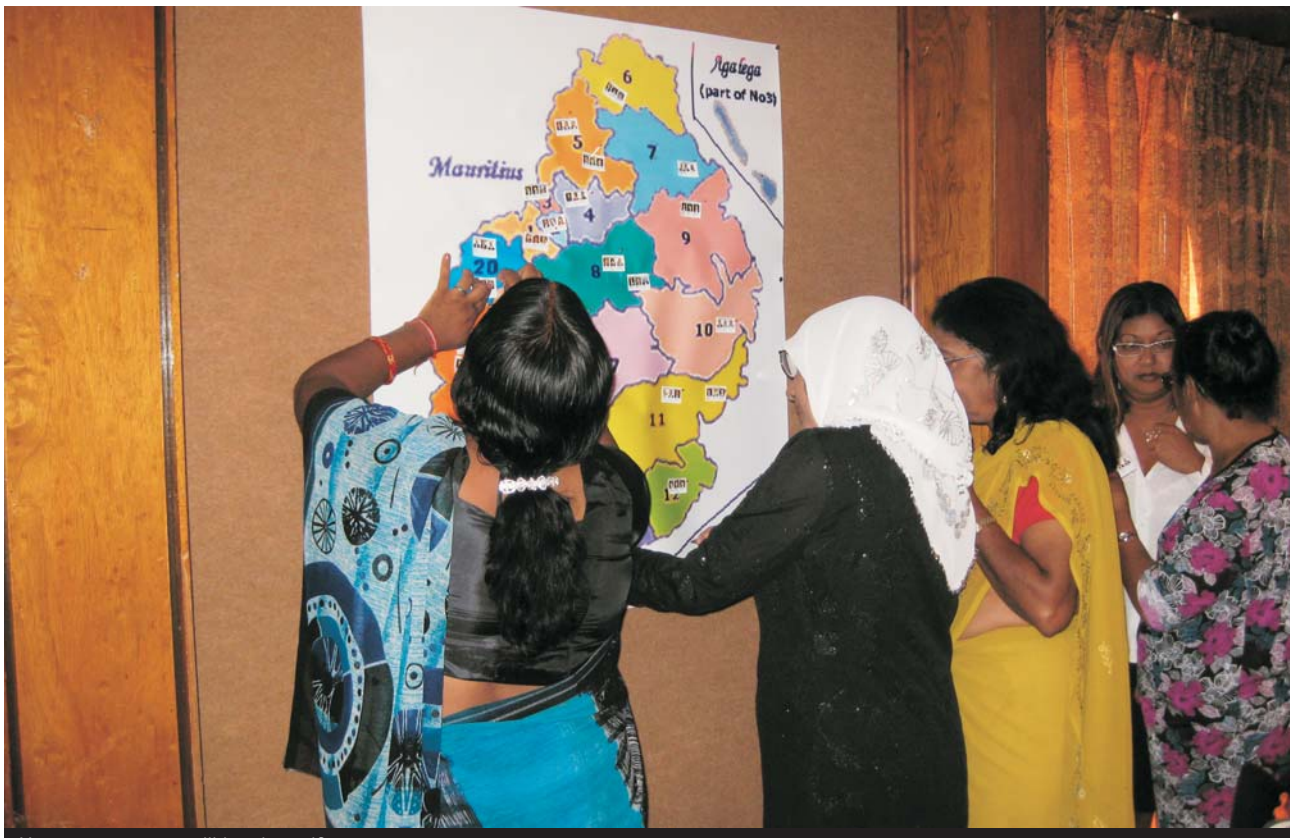


Parliamentarians Leela Devi Dookhun (now Minister of Social Security) surrounded by Mirella Martin and Sheila Grenade at Award Ceremony. ***Photo: Mary Coopan***

FIGURE TWELVE: WOMEN AND MEN AS PRESENTERS ACROSS ALL MEDIA MONITORED - MAURITIUS



As shown in Figure 12 that there were more women (51%) presenters than men in the electronic media monitored. Women presenters at *MBC Radio* at 94% far outstrip their male counterparts. The *MBC television* also had more female presenters with 58% women while *Radio Plus* had fewer women presenters at 27%.

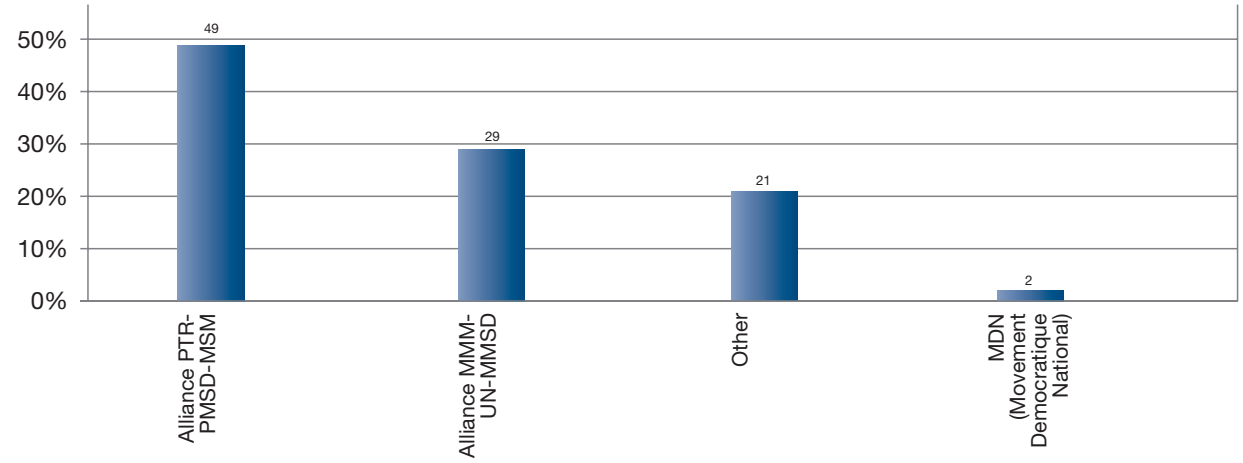


How many women will be elected?

Photo: Loga Virahsawmy

Coverage of political parties

FIGURE THIRTEEN: NUMBER OF TIMES A POLITICAL PARTY IS MENTIONED BY ALL MEDIA HOUSES - MAURITIUS



As illustrated in Figure 13 the Alliance PTR-PMSD-MSM received 49% of mentions in elections stories compared to the Alliance MMM-UN-MMSD which received 29% of the total number of mentions. The ruling alliance, PTR, PMSD and MSM dominated election coverage in Mauritius.



Mirella Martin, a political candidate, being interviewed by a journalist.

Photo: Loga Virahsawmy

Breakdown of election stories by genre

FIGURE FOURTEEN: BREAKDOWN OF ELECTION STORIES BY GENRE - MAURITIUS

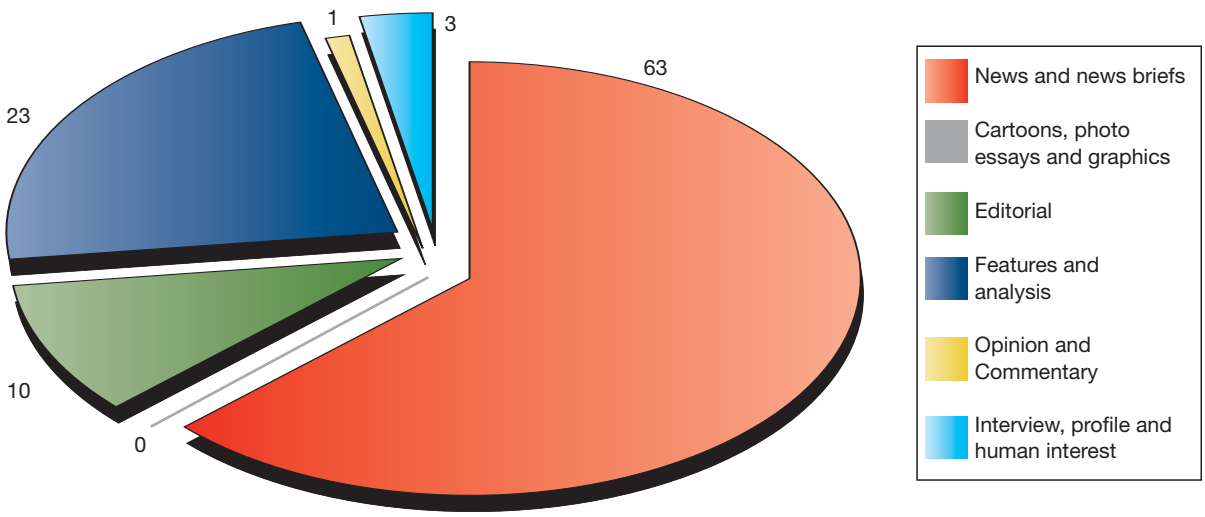
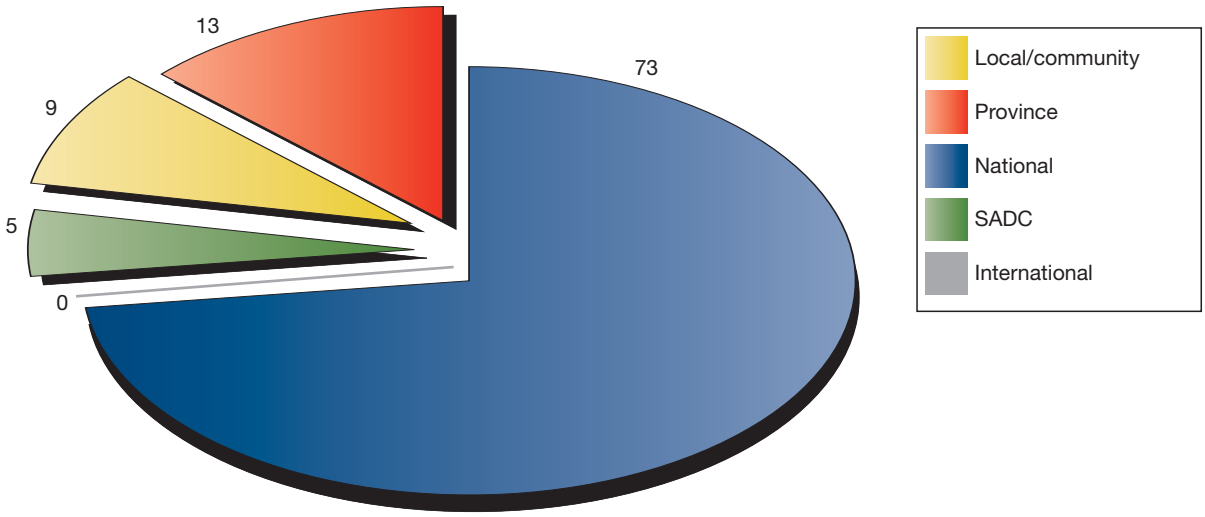


Figure 14 shows that the vast majority of stories written during the monitoring period were 63% news and news in brief. Features and analysis is 23% compared to the GMPS at 15%; and editorial is at 10% in the present study, compared to the GMPS at 5%.

Geographical scope of stories

FIGURE FIFTEEN: GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE OF ELECTION STORIES - MAURITIUS



Nearly all the articles (86%) during the monitoring period were national stories. National elections tend to dominate the agenda.

5 CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

conclusions & recommendations



Loga Virahsawmy talks to MBC about the state of women in politics. ***Photo: Naseem Ackbarally***

It is clear from the Mauritius elections that gender was not a topic for discussion among political parties. Most of the stories on campaigns were championed by civil society, especially Gender Links and Women in Networking (WIN). WIN campaigned for each political party to put one woman in each constituency and encouraged voters to vote for women and not for political parties.

The media profiled women candidates but those in small parties did not get media coverage. Two days before the general elections, WIN invited the media to meet women candidates and this is the only time when they were interviewed by the media.

There is need for a balance all reporting, from high profile politicians to grassroots political activists. In Mauritius it is a well known fact that women are very good as political activists, doing door-to-door campaigns as well as opening up their homes for political meetings.

The media did not engage with political parties about what mechanisms they put in place to promote women in leadership. The media also failed to question leaders on the key issues in their party manifestos.

When both leaders of the two major alliances talked about women, one asked men to "prant kont" (take care) as in 2015 there might be more women. The other leader highlighted that in 2015, he will field 30% women candidates. The media should have taken them to task and written further on this issue.

Solutions to mainstreaming gender in news coverage require both short and long terms measures. Short term measures include short courses in gender reporting, targeting both junior and senior journalists and most importantly, editors. The long term solution is to change the curricula of media training institutions to include a gender reporting component so that students internalise the skills.

Capacity building for women to understand leadership, to play leadership roles and to gain confidence in profiling themselves in political arenas is crucial in the region. Women's groups need to support and encourage women to take political leadership roles.

Women who are sources in the media need to be empowered and confident on the issues discussed. The media needs to approach both women and men to discuss and comment on issues.



A journalist interviewing a woman candidate.

Photo: Loga Virahsawmy

PROFILES WRITTEN BY PARTICIPANTS AT THE WOMEN IN POLITICS WORKSHOP FOR THE LABOUR PARTY

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Etre disponible pour répondre aux besoins

Je suis Priscilla Duval et j'habite la Cité L'Oiseau à Floréal. Je suis mariée et mère de trois enfants. J'ai longtemps été une femme au foyer. Jusqu'à ce qu'on m'invite un jour à une réunion de quartier. C'est à ce moment là que j'ai rencontré quelques politiciens.

Il y avait là une politicienne plus jeune, en l'occurrence Stéphanie Anquetil, qui était très en verve. Elle m'a inspirée. Je me suis dit si elle est arrivée à faire de la politique, je pouvais peut-être en faire autant. Je voulais suivre son exemple et m'engager dans la politique active.

A partir de là, j'ai parlé à mon mari. J'avais peur qu'il n'approuve pas ma décision car sa philosophie est: «une femme est faite pour rester à la maison». De plus, il est très jaloux. J'ai toutefois été très étonnée de sa réaction. Il m'a encouragée à aller de l'avant.

Lors des élections générales de 2005, on m'a nommée présidente du centre communautaire de la Cité L'Oiseau. J'ai œuvré avec plusieurs groupes de quartier afin de faire revivre la cité. J'ai organisé de nombreuses activités pour encourager les jeunes à pratiquer le sport, des déjeuners pour les personnes du troisième âge, des sorties pour les handicapés, des rencontres avec les membres de l'aile féminine.

J'ai aussi travaillé à la Cité Mangalkhan, surtout avec les jeunes et je fais partie de la *Women's League*, supervisée par Sheila Bappoo, ministre de la Sécurité sociale. Je suis aussi membre de l'aile jeune du PTr, contrôlée par le député Etienne Sinatambou.

En 2006 et avec la collaboration du *Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund*, la maire de Curepipe et de dynamiques volontaires, j'ai organisé l'anniversaire de la Cité L'Oiseau avec des remises de prix et un concert animé par des artistes de la cité. Cet évènement a connu un vif succès. Les députés de l'endroit étaient ravis.

Deux ans plus tard, j'ai été nommée membre de l'exécutif du PTr avec pour responsabilité la circonscription de Vacoas/Phoenix. Consciente des nombreux problèmes sociaux guettant les jeunes, j'ai travaillé avec la NATReSa pour les sensibiliser contre l'usage de drogue, le travail sexuel et la violence. Les grossesses précoces sont également source d'inquiétude pour moi et à l'avenir, je compte me pencher sur cette question très délicate.

Pour conclure, j'ai fait tout ce chemin avec le PTr car j'ai confiance en ce parti et en son expertise. De plus, l'accueil chaleureux qui m'a été réservé par les membres de ce parti m'a donné la force de me lancer en politique. C'est à travers ce parti et ses membres que j'ai été sensibilisée au social et je suis convaincue qu'avec l'appui des Rouges, nous arriverons à suivre et régler bon nombre de problèmes avec sérieux et rigueur.

Aartee Ramsahye

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L'avenir se prépare dès aujourd'hui

Un bébé allait naitre et l'accouchement s'annonçait difficile. La future mère se tordait de douleurs. Sa vie et celle de l'enfant à naître étaient menacées. La sage femme était impuissante. Comme il y avait un meeting politique dans le village et que l'orateur était médecin, la sage femme a couru lui demander de l'aide. Il a interrompu le meeting pour aller au chevet de la femme en détresse et a mené à bien l'accouchement. Le médecin n'était autre que le Dr Maurice Curé, fondateur du Parti Travailliste (PTr). Le bébé, c'était moi, Aartee Ramsahye. Je n'ai jamais oublié cette histoire que me racontait souvent ma mère.

J'ai grandi, je me suis mariée et j'ai eu trois enfants. Mais c'est toujours d'une oreille attentive que j'écoute les discours politiques, en particulier ceux du Ptr. Je me suis engagée auprès de ce parti il y a 14 ans après avoir écouté un discours du Dr Navin Ramgoolam, leader du PTr, un 1er mai. Ses paroles m'ont inspiré confiance et j'ai voulu soutenir ce parti et son leader.

Je me suis mise à faire du travail à la base au sein de ma circonscription. J'ai connu des hauts sous forme de victoire de mon parti aux différentes élections mais aussi le goût amer de la défaite. Mais étant une fonceuse, je n'ai jamais baissé les bras.

Mon expérience du terrain m'a fait realiser que les femmes souffrent de la pauvreté, sont victimes de la violence domestique et dépendent toujours d'un mari, d'un frère et d'un père pour leur survie alors qu'elles devraient être financièrement indépendantes. C'est pour cette raison que j'aimerais qu'un plus grand nombre de femmes se joignent au PTr car je crois qu'elles peuvent y insuffler de nouvelles idées et faire bouger les choses.

J'ai une vision et des ambitions d'aller plus loin et plus haut en politique car je crois qu'il faut toujours récolter les fruits de l'arbre que l'on a planté. Je souhaite que le PTr amène encore plus de réformes et aligne un plus grand nombre de femmes candidates car je crois qu'un plus grand nombre de femmes parlementaires accélèrera le développement et le progrès du pays. L'avenir doit se préparer aujourd'hui.

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The will to serve

My first step into the political realm was when I first met Navin Ramgoolam in 2000. My mum was offered a job as secretary in the Mauritius Labour Party Office.

I was so passionate about the degradation of the environment that when I was doing my secondary education at Loreto College, Mahebourg, I founded the "Environment and Health Club" and I was elected as President for two consecutive years. I am proud to say that it was one of the most dynamic clubs involving students and teachers. We engaged in a wide range of activities including marches, planting indigenous plants (which are still alive), brown bag workshops as well as talks and conferences.

During my college years I participated in debates and morning prayers. This not only helped me tremendously to gain confidence in myself and be able to talk in public but encouraged me to participate in the Model United Nations.

At the end of 2001, when I was only 17 years old I started to work as a trainee reporter for *The Star* newspaper. This was my first encounter with politicians and during the same year, the Young Labour (youth wing of the Labour Party) was set up by the then Secretary-General, Vasant Bunwaree. Unfortunately although I participated relentlessly in all activities of the Young Labour, the organisation had a slow death due to bad leadership. Nevertheless, I spent all my free time in the Labour Party's office which became my "second home".

After completing my Higher School Certificate, I continued my job at *The Star* newspaper until I started university. I wanted to study law but despite my good results, I was dumb-founded when I did not get a place as a law student. Instead, I was offered a place to study language.

On this fateful day there was a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Labour Party. I was waiting at the door and could not stop crying. Arvin Boolell came out and was shocked to see me in this state. I told him that my world was crumbling because I would not be able to become a lawyer. He called me to his office and said "Your determination reminds me of my dad, Satcam Boolell. He almost became Prime Minister of this country. My advice to you is to be firm but humble. You can become the first woman Prime Minister of this country, who knows!" I will always remember these soothing and caring words. I do not know if his words will translate into reality but I am prepared to serve the community with the best of my ability.

His blessings were so genuine and so strong that it was like a divine intervention and the next Saturday I was offered a place to study law at the University of Mauritius (UoM).

During my first year at university, a lecturer saw my enthusiasm for politics and started discussing it with me. He wanted to know my political objectives and my commitment. He believed in me and became my mentor. In 2004, with his encouragement and blessings, I founded the Naturally Wild Club, which was also concerned with the environment. Again, the NWC was one of the most active clubs on the campus. All my classmates became members of the NWC and massive membership recruitment took place, thus making the NWC the most well-known club. By then I became famous and was offered to stand as a candidate for the Students Union (SU) elections. At the last minute I left the winning team on a question of ideology. They were tagged as supporting one community and this was against my principles. Needless to say, I lost the election.

I then founded a magazine named *Zot Newz* (Your News) and became the editor-in-chief. The objective of the magazine was to keep students abreast of campus news, including how their money was being used by the SU and the administration of the University. Transparency was the order of the day and it did not take long for the magazine to reveal certain truths. Zot Newz was quite a success.

My active participation in the electoral campaign for the 2005 general elections helped me a lot. I did door-to-door campaigning and convinced people to vote for the Labour Party. I will always remember how I rebuked Raj Mathur for his biased attitude in a debate organised by the Political Society at the UoM in which Sarat Lallah and Ivan Collendavelloo took part, as secretary-generals of their respective parties. I had the support of all the students present.

In that same year, I was once again solicited to be candidate for the SU. With my past experiences I joined the right party and did the right campaigning. We won all the seats. The President of the Union promised me the seat of Vice President but this never happened. In fact he was afraid that I would stand up to him and instead offered me the seat of Secretary which I refused. I was the only girl who was elected and they wanted to put me in a stereotypical position. I wanted to challenge all stereotypes and prove that a girl can be as good as a boy, if not better. My fighting spirit came to the surface and I started asking many questions. All I got as a reply was "You are a girl!" He even told me to stay quiet when he was taking money from the Students Union Fund. I was shocked and we argued a lot. He started insulting me using foul language. I was so angry that I had no control over my tears. I removed my high heel sandal and started hitting him. Even now I cannot understand how I did a thing like that and I still remember that nobody came to his rescue. Although he did apologise, I was kept out of all further decisions taken.

One day I discovered that the SU hired one bus but charged for two buses. I did a vox pop with those who travelled in the bus and gathered enough evidence to write an article for *Zot Newz* and to the University administration (which administered the funds of the SU). The administration attempted a cover-up in order to protect the reputation of the UoM but the cat was out of the bag and I gathered further proof of activities organised by the SU and by clubs affiliated to it whereby fraud and corruption cases came to light. Again no action was taken. The administration was hand-in-glove with them. I retained the services of a barrister and served a letter to the Vice-Chancellor of the UoM. The SU fund was frozen immediately. A few days later, everything started functioning like before.

A journalist who had followed this case advised me to report the case to the Independent Commission Against Corruption which I did. The administration then started an enquiry by the internal auditor. All concerned parties were heard. When I was called, the internal auditor tried his best to convince me not to go ahead with the case. No need to say that will all this news, *Zot Newz* became tremendously popular and sold like hot cakes. The President almost knelt down asking me to stop selling *Zot Newz.*

The administration set up a committee to investigate into the matter. My legal knowledge

and my political belonging created some sort of fear in those present. They weighed every word before saying anything. The Vice-Chancellor gave me two days to gather all evidence I had against the President. I brought all evidence within two hours.

In 2006, when I was still waiting for my results, I was nominated executive member of the Labour Party by the Prime Minister. I was only 22 years old and became the youngest executive member. I followed the footsteps of my mother who founded the Labour Party women's league of *L'Escalier*. The main objective of the league was the empowerment of women. I became a gender activist and participated in all activities, be it cultural or social and caring for the needy and the vulnerable.

In 2007, I was once again nominated executive member of the Labour Party and was also the first woman to be on the executive of the Young Labour. With the blessing of members of parliament I organised a recreational day that saw a great success with 400 youngsters. This was the first biggest activity organised by the Young Labour and it started in my constituency. I recently helped in the re-opening of a library in *L'Escalier,* which is managed by youngsters on a voluntary basis.

The year 2007 was also a year of blessing. I took a job as Adviser in Public Relations at the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare. This gave me the opportunity to help vulnerable women and to be even more aware of gender equality.

In August 2009, I was delegated as young political leader of the Labour Party to participate in the 3rd China-Africa Youth Festival in Beijing.

Today at the age of 25, I am completely rooted in the ideologies and principles of the Labour Party. The aim of the party to attain social justice in the making and implementation of its decisions has become my own objective in life. I believe in my party and my leader and I cannot dissociate from the righteous path on which my political leaders are walking.

While I am waiting for my Bar Vocational Examination results to be qualified as a lawyer, my goal is to soar with the eagles and to serve the people with the humble heart that Arvin Boolell had mentioned. His words are etched in my heart and I already find myself on a journey to serve the community through my political involvement and social commitments.

Diane Prosper

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The essence of social service

My name is Diane Prosper and I live in Quatre-Bornes in particular in the Labour Party, which was in opposition at the time, grew when I saw Sheila Bapoo on a TV programme. It was a programme on the Women's League of the Labour Party, and I immediately recognised Bapoo, who was my French Teacher in college. I was very fascinated by her and what she was saying and I felt an urge to join her. Soon after, I wrote a letter to her expressing my desire to join the party. She called me immediately and sent Renuka Brigemohane to see me at work. Two years before the 2005 general elections, I joined the Labour Party.

Most of the time, I am engaged in Labour Party meetings, doing canvassing and engaging in other related activities. To me, women are very important in politics because most of them always believe that rendering service to the needy is the essence of human nature. This alone proves the willingness and determination of women to achieve any human aspirations successfully and to become good citizens.

In politics, it is necessary to provide social services to the needy and to earn goodwill. This constant exposure will blossom your personality.

Women in politics can help other women who need help feel more secure and hence make communication easier. Many women ask me if I can help them or their children to get a job or help them with other personal problems. This breeds a peculiar satisfaction which is quite ineffable. That is why I helped my friends from the municipal council by providing some creative ideas. Neighbours and people in my locality receive my support and I advise them to participate in political activities.

Sometimes, when people request work that I am not willing to undertake, I only express my inability to do so and do not give them false hopes. In 2008, my daughter and my son joined the *L'aile Jeune* of the Labour Party, and they always accompany me to meet people in my area. I have no problem coping with family life and political life because my family agrees with what I do and say for the Labour Party. In fact, they have shown their appreciation towards my engagement in politics.

People who I admire the most in politics are Nita Deerpalsing and Sheila Bapoo. Others who I also admire are our Prime Minister, Ramgoolam, the Minister of Finance, Sithanen and the Minister of Tourism, Duval. I try to study the good qualities of those I admire and strive to develop them in myself.

Today, I sincerely believe that people can rely on the Labour Party for the progress of our island. Personally, I like helping people to progress too. I still remain an active member and this year I have made a resolution to allocate more time to politics.

Mary Back

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La politique: le moyen par excellence de servir

Quand je suis venue au monde, mon père était très heureux. Mais aussi un peu déçu. Il souhaitait que je sois un garçon car il avait eu une fille avant moi. Heureusement qu'il ne m'a pas donné de prénom masculin. Je me vois mal m'appeler Jacques ou Abel. Il a fini par fixer son choix sur Mary.

Je m'appelle donc Mary Back. Back est mon nom de femme mariée. Etant la cadette d'une famille de deux enfants, j'ai toujours été choyée par mes parents. Ils m'ont inculquée le sens du devoir, l'obligation de bien faire ce que l'on doit et la notion que chaque être humain a pour mission d'aider à l'avancement de ses semblables.

Donc, depuis que je suis enfant, j'apprends qu'il faut que je me dévoue pour les autres. Dans cette optique, c'est tout naturellement que je me suis tournée vers le travail social. J'ai vite compris que pour aider les autres, il faut avoir un caractère bien trempé, une instruction solide et l'amour du prochain.

Par rapport à mon instruction, j'ai dû interrompre mes études après ma Form V car mes parents n'avaient pas les moyens de continuer à payer mes frais de scolarité. J'ai donc continué à m'instruire par le biais de livres que je dévorais durant mes heures de loisirs.

Pour aider ma famille à joindre les deux bouts, j'ai dû chercher un travail juste après avoir arrêté l'école. A 18 ans, je portais déjà un salaire à la maison.

A 19 ans, je me suis mariée et j'ai fondé une famille. Mon premier enfant est né quatre ans plus tard. En attendant, j'ai pris des cours de secrétariat et d'informatique, tout en travaillant car je voulais me perfectionner. Parallèlement, j'aidais les plus démunis grâce au travail social. J'en tirais d'énormes satisfactions et je me sentais utile.

Au fil du temps, j'ai réalisé que le meilleur moyen pour soulager la misère est de prendre une option politique. En 1990, j'ai adhéré au Parti Travailliste car sa politique sociale correspond à mes aspirations.

Etant de foi Catholique et pratiquante de surcroît, j'ai pris des cours bibliques pour mieux comprendre la parole du Christ. Jai contribué au travail du diocèse en travaillant comme secrétaire bénévole à la Ligue Ouvrière Chrétienne. J'ai aussi œuvré pour le nouvel Institut pour le Développement et le Progrès, une organisation non-gouvernementale auprès de laquelle j'ai eu l'occasion de suivre des cours de formations en développement communautaire, en leadership, en Constitution, en Credit Union pour ne citer que ceux-là. Matières qui m'ont été très utiles quand j'ai été élue conseillère aux élections municipales de 2005.

Cette première expérience électorale a été très enrichissante. J'avais déjà été agent mais être candidate a une autre dimension. Il me fallait convaincre que j'avais les compétences voulues pour représenter mes mandants comme il se doit. Afin de me jauger, le parti m'a désignée pour animer les débats radiophoniques contre nos adversaires. J'ai dû démontrer que je pouvais m'exprimer avec aisance sur des sujets ayant trait au bien-être de nos concitoyens.

Je suis très consciente que faire de la politique active quand on est une femme demande énormément de sacrifices et de persévérance. Mais je crois aussi que rien n'arrive seul et que pour toute chose, il y a un prix à payer. Et que lorsque l'on met son cœur dans le but que l'on poursuit, quand on est résolu à surmonter les obstacles, rien ne peux nous arrêter.

Sur le plan personnel, j'ai subi de dures épreuves, notamment un divorce. Mais la plus terrible d'entre toutes a été de perdre mon père pendant la campagne électorale. Il est dommage qu'il n'ait pas vu mon élection. J'aurais pu baisser les bras et me laisser abattre. Au lieu de quoi, ces difficultés m'ont dopée et m'ont permis de faire face à tout, y compris aux responsabilités familiales. Ce n'est pas facile tous les jours d'avoir à sa charge trois enfants et une mère de 83 ans. Mais comme toujours, la détermination et l'amour font des miracles.

En tant que conseillère municipale, je suis connue pour mon travail en faveur de mes mandants. Les dirigeants du parti le reconnaissent car ils m'ont confié la présidence du comité de bien-être de la femme, de l'enfant et de la famille depuis trois ans. Je veux croire que le moment venu, mon leader me jugera apte à passer à l'étape supérieure, soit être candidate à la députation.

J'ai énormément apprécié le cours de leadership animé par Gender Links car c'est une formation valorisante pour celles qui veulent faire une carrière en politique. Pour conclure, je dirai que je considère la politique comme le moyen par excellence pour servir le peuple et la patrie. C'est ce que je me suis jurée de faire jusqu'à mon dernier souffle.

Mirella Palmyre

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La politique dans le sang

La politique coule dans mes veines. Je suis Mirella Palmyre, la fille qui sourit tout le temps, indépendamment que son humeur soit bonne ou mauvaise.

J'avais environ neuf ou dix ans et je gardais les animaux. Ils étaient nombreux, soit 64 cabris et 15 agneaux. Il y avait aussi deux jolis petits moutons blancs et deux boucs rouges. Je leur avais donné un nom. Le mouton, c'était Paul Bérenger. J'appelais le cabri Ti Ramgoolam, pour sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam. A chaque fois que j'allais écouter les discours politiques sous la boutique Ah Moy, je me faisais gronder par mon père qui me trouvait là. Il me demandait de rentrer immédiatement à la maison.

Tous les matins, je faisais des meetings avec mes animaux et à chaque fois que mon père venait me voir dans les bois où je les gardais, il m'entendait parler aux bêtes et me traitait de folle. Moi, je faisais la sourde oreille et je continuais à parler à mes animaux et je mettais Bérenger et Ti Ramgoolam au centre de tout quand j'intervenais.

En 1982, j'étais en Form III. Mon enseignant adorait la politique et nous parlait de politique en salle de classe. J'étais très émue par son côté passionné et cela m'a donné l'envie d'en faire malgré les obstacles sur ma route.

Je voyais de nombreux problèmes dans mon quartier de Roche-Bois: l'usage de drogues, la pauvreté, le manque de développement. J'ai compris qu'il me fallait lutter pour mon quartier et qu'il fallait aux habitants une personne qui soit à leur écoute. Je suis une battante qui ne baisse pas les bras. J'adore parler en public et écouter les gens en face de moi. Je me suis jointe au Parti Travailliste en 1995 et après, j'ai intégré son exécutif.

En 2004, j'ai déclenché une grève devant la cour de l'école primaire de la localité en raison de son état d'abandon. Le lendemain, il y avait une réunion de l'exécutif du parti. Et comme j'avais fait la Une des journaux dans la matinée, lors de la réunion du parti, le leader, Navin Ramgoolam, m'a dit : «Continue ainsi. C'est comme cela qu'il faut se battre».

En 2005, je suis devenue membre du bureau politique du parti. La même année, j'ai été encouragée à poser ma candidature lors des élections municipales et j'ai été élue conseillère. C'est une expérience extraordinaire à vivre. A chaque réunion du conseil, j'émets des suggestions pour améliorer la qualité de vie des citadins. Je dois remercier mon époux qui m'encourage beaucoup, ainsi que mes deux fils. Je suis fière de faire de la politique active et de servir les citadins, tout en restant à leur écoute. Il en sera ainsi tant que je suis en vie. Mon rêve serait d'obtenir une investiture pour les élections générales.

J'espère qu'il y aura un plus grand nombre de femmes à faire de la politique active et qu'un jour, le pays ait une femme Premier ministre ou Présidente de la République.

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Faire les autres réaliser leurs rêves

Mon cœur a explosé de joie quand la cinquantaine d'aspirantes femmes entrepreneurs ont reçu leurs diplômes en fabrication de rideaux, en design et en décoration intérieure en mai dernier. A cette époque, leurs travaux qui étaient exposés dans la cour de la mairie de Port-Louis avaient transformé le lieu en décor féérique et coloré.

Ceci a été possible grâce à l'*Innovative Women Association and Entrepreneur Development* que j'ai crée en 2006 sur une base bénévole et sans aucune cotisation, en utilisant seulement les facilités et ressources mises à la disposition du public par le gouvernement à travers des institutions telles que la *Small and Medium Handicraft Development Authority*, le *National Women Entrepreneur Council* etc. Près de 200 femmes ont ainsi pu bénéficier de formations dans divers domaines. L'objectif était d'aider les femmes à se former et à développer leurs talents pour combattre la pauvreté et accéder à une plus grande autonomie financière. Je milite pour l'émergence des femmes entrepreneurs depuis des années. J'ai toujours eu un faible pour la politique car mes grands-parents maternels connaissaient feu sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam (SSR) qui était notre médecin de famille. Quand j'étais enfant, je portais toujours un badge en métal avec la photo de SSR dessus. Ma défunte mère ne se lassait pas de me raconter les évènements politiques de l'époque de SSR et moi qui n'avais que huit-neuf ans, je l'écoutais, fascinée.

C'est en 1995 que j'ai adhéré au Parti Travailliste (PTr) et je portais mes vêtements rouges avec beaucoup de fierté. J'admirais le leader, Navin Ramgoolam, qui est un rassembleur et un homme généreux. J'ai aussi côtoyé Indira Sidaya à l'époque où elle était ministre de la Femme et moi employée à ce ministère. De ce contact, j'ai pu renforcer mes capacités et mettre mes qualités en valeur. En 1996, j'ai été la première femme de foi islamique à être nommée pour représenter la circonscription numéro 3 au sein de l'exécutif du PTr.

Je suis actuellement la première femme à avoir été élue présidente du centre communautaire de ma localité à Plaine Verte. Le 12 mars dernier, j'ai reçu une décoration de la République. Je suis très fière que le fruit de mes années de travail ait été reconnu par l'Etat et par le Premier ministre. Je crois dur comme fer en le proverbe chinois qui dit que «Women hold half the sky». La femme a toujours su faire preuve de souplesse et maintenir un équilibre entre ses divers rôles. Je vais continuer à aider un plus grand nombre de femmes se trouvant en bas de l'échelle pour qu'elles jouent pleinement leur rôle dans la société. Quand on a envie de réussir dans la vie, la foi dans ses convictions permet d'accomplir des miracles.

Sabit Kalasopaten

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Striking the right balance

I come from a modest family of 12 children. Life did not do me any favours being a girl. Despite all my personal, emotional and financial problems, I decided to work hard at school. All my efforts paid and I obtained an A grade in all my subjects at the Certificate for Primary Education (CPE) examinations.

But to my surprise, I was told that girls should stay at home. Like most Hindu families, my father did not believe in further education for girls and thought he would get better value sending his boys to colleges instead.

In 1977, an important Mauritian personality helped to change my life. The vision he had for a just society made me become another person and I joined politics. I am talking here of the late Prime Minister, Seewoosagur Ramgoolam. He changed the face of the nation by giving free education to the whole population irrespective of social class or sex. I immediately seized this opportunity to do my secondary education.

I was touched and inspired by the generosity of Ramgoolam and the compassion he had for the poor. He was my role model and I too decided to stand on my feet and contribute to Mauritian society, hence my commitment in engaging myself in social work and politics. I believe that both are related. I want to help in changing the lives of the hundreds of vulnerable people, to give them hope and to support them. My brother who is active in politics has been of great support.

At the age of eight, I was active in the Girls Guide Association where I acquired lots of experience under the leadership of Viviane Brun. After three years I was nominated chieftain. I then joined *La Fraternite des Handicape* (IMCA) despite the objection of my father and brothers. I also persevered in social and sports activities. I will never forget the day I organised Mother's Day at the Marie Reine de la Paix Centre. I was only 13 years old and the event was a great success!

My life took another new turn when I got married and moved to Pointe aux Sables in 2001. The lack of activities for the young in this region caught my attention and with the support of my husband I wanted to bring joy into the lives of children and women. I set up an organisation under the name of *Arc en Ciel* for the young and alsoa Women's Association. I worked really hard for the welfare of members of both organisations, irrespective of ethnicities. Both organisations became very popular through the various activities we engaged in, be it education, leisure, sports, camping or individual growth and development. All members of the family were encouraged to participate in the activities and I focused my attention on the vulnerable. I chose the slogan *Harmonie, Liberté et Diversité* (Harmony, Liberty and Diversity).

I am proud to say that I am still the President of both organisations. Meanwhile I followed courses in Children Development at the National Children's Council under the aegis of the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare. I participated in talks organised in primary schools and for years I have participated in a variety of activities organised by various ministries and the Municipal Council of Port Louis. I am always looking for funds to buy toys for needy children and to offer lunches to the elderly and the poor.

Due to my capacity to make friends and to keep good relationships with other organisations, I became the only woman on the Executive Committee of a Football Club.

As I was always interested in politics, I did not hesitate when James Burty David asked me to help the Labour Party. I was honoured and delighted when I was appointed executive member of the Labour Party and I will always be grateful to Navin Ramgoolam for his consideration towards women.

I am always striking the right balance between social and political life as I am aware of all the personal sacrifices that I have to make.

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Mon appel à la politique

Suzy Coombes, née à Maurice dans les années 50, benjamine d'une famille de quatre enfants, je fais mes études secondaires au collège Lorette de Port Louis.

En 1970, je rejoins une partie de ma famille établie en France. Je débute alors une formation d'infirmière psychiatrique au centre de formation de l'hôpital d'Étampes dans l'Essonne. Je travaille par la suite dans un établissement psychiatrique « l'hôpital de l'Eau Vive » durant 16 années avec des enfants souffrant d'un handicap moteur.

Malgré ma passion pour ce métier, j'ai toujours souhaitais aller plus loin dans mes études, je tente alors une reconversion qui me réussi immédiatement, obtenant un Brevet Technique Supérieur (BTS) en marketing, tourisme et relations publiques.

Après 17 années, lors de vacances à Maurice, je rencontre celui qui deviendra mon époux et décide de ne plus repartir.

Bien qu'étant femme au foyer et mère de deux enfants, j'ai à un moment ressenti le besoin de prendre soin des autres et de mettre mon temps libre à la disposition des plus démuni. C'est ainsi que j'ai découvert la cité Ste Catherine, à St Pierre, avec son lot de misères et de détresses, ses familles défavorisées au point où dix personnes vivaient dans un deux-pièces faisant à la fois office de chambre et de cuisine et où les enfants n'étaient pas scolarisés. Ma nouvelle vocation était toute trouvée.

En 1989, je prends la décision de consacrer pratiquement tout mon temps au social, ce qui m'incita à mettre sur pied une équipe afin d'encadrer les enfants ayant aussi bien besoin d'un soutien scolaire que d'un encadrement plus global. Nous animons des cours d'alphabétisation à leur intention et en parallèle, nous aidons les mamans dans leurs démarches administratives. Reconnue pour le travail social que je fais dans les quartiers défavorisés, je suis approchée par une politicienne suite à une interview de presse accordée à feu Thérèse Appasamy, journaliste à «Le Mauricien».

C'est là que «LA POLITIQUE», qui était ma passion cachée, a resurgi. J'ai grandi dans une famille où la politique tiens une place importante. Je me souviens des soirées très animées où mon père qui soutenait le Parti Travailliste et ma tante, qui suivait le Parti Mauricien Social Démocrate, avaient de longues discussions sur l'avenir du pays.

Mon père m'a inculqué le sens de la justice, de l'égalité, du respect, de l'appartenance et le devoir envers mon pays.

Je me souviens aussi d'un 1er Mai. Impressionnée par le grand rassemblement à Marie Reine de la

Paix, toujours très solennel avec des travailleurs qui venaient de très loin portant avec fierté leurs outils de travail.

Quelques années plus tard, c'est juché sur les épaules de mon père que j'assistais aux meetings. Et là, je rêvais en secret d'être politicienne car dans ma tête d'enfant, j'étais persuadée que c'était un moyen d'aider les autres.

Ce rêve de petite fille a pris forme en France ou j'ai eu une brève expérience politique au sein du Parti Socialiste, mais c'est à mon retour à Maurice que j'ai décidé de le concrétiser.

Depuis 1990 je fais de la politique active au sein du Parti Travailliste, mais c'est en 1991 que ma détermination de faire triompher mon parti se révèle, je découvre alors cette envie inéluctable de porter haut le nom de notre leader l'honorable Dr Navin Ramgoolam. En 1995 c'est avec une grande joie que notre partie remporte l'élection haut la main et que notre leader deviens alors le Premier Ministre. L'année suivante c'est avec honneur que j'acceptais ma nomination comme membre de l'exécutif du parti (PTr).

En 1996, sous la houlette de Mme Sheila Bapoo (Présidente du womens league) qui la restructura totalement, je fus l'une des premières femmes à représenter la circonscription no 8 au niveau de l'aile féminine. Depuis nous avons enregistré une augmentation significative du nombre de nos partisanes.

Depuis quelques années, j'ai repris une vie professionnelle active et suis directrice commerciale au sein d'une agence de communication.

Je n'ai pas cessé pour autant de faire du social. La situation de nombreuses familles a changé dans les différentes cités ouvrières où j'ai eu le privilège d'apporter ma contribution et une amélioration significative s'y est fait sentir ces dernières années. Mais il reste encore beaucoup à faire afin d'endiguer la pauvreté.

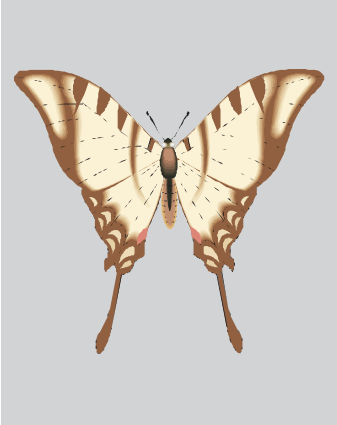
Mes proches et amis louent ma fidélité, ma sincérité, ma solidarité, ma persévérance et mon professionnalisme. On me dit têtue mais je me considère comme étant une battante, surtout quand il s'agit de venir en aide aux plus démunis. C'est ainsi que j'ai fait mienne la devise du regretté Bob Marley qui chantait: «GET UP, STAND UP AND FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHTS».

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Turning bad Karma into a positive one

I would never have imagined that one day I could join politics and become a member of the Executive Committee of the Labour Party. It is never too late to learn. The red colour of the Labour Party is like my blood.

Born in a poor family of five children, I saw lots of violence. My father used to drink and beat by mother. He did nothing worthwhile in his life. It was my mother who did everything so that the children could go to school. Being the eldest, I had to do the household chores before going to school. Taking private tuition was a common activity and my heart was broken because I could not join the classes as my mother could not afford the fees. My teacher cursed me and said I would be a good for nothing.

Although I got bad results at the end of my primary education, I was admitted at Friendship College. Before going to school I used to walk long distances to get straw from sugar cane fields in order to feed the animals. I nevertheless carried on with school up to Form IV. Even now I do not know if I have passed or failed my exams since the Headmaster had failed me, but then promoted me and then failed me again.

Although I had the chance to join a secretarial course, I kept saying to myself that I was born under a bad karma and would not succeed in life. I had nobody to support or guide me. However, I had lots of admirers with my long black hair falling to my hips. As any young girl of my age, my dream was to find the charming prince, get married and have children. But once again my destiny played tricks on me. I fell in love with a boy in my family but when he came to ask for my hand, my father refused.

I used to admire political activists of the Labour Party walking around, talking to people and campaigning. I was so impressed and I started to imitate them and wanted to talk in the loudspeaker like them. Each time I met them, I told them I wanted to join them in their activities. “I want to join politics” I told them one day. I finally did but I believe I was seen as a threat. When they saw that I had good communication skills and became quite popular, they were not happy. They said I had a big mouth and as there had never been a woman parliamentarian in my constituency. Breaking new grounds was not acceptable for a woman. on top of that, my family was a big obstacle. Had they helped me and encouraged me, I would have been quite somebody in politics.

In 1995 I worked as a “pulling agent” for a politician. I was at my best and did everything I was told to do. I was proud of myself. For once I felt I was in control of my life and made my own revolution. Unfortunately, my life did not change after that.

My most difficult period was between 1997 and 1998. I felt I was trying to climb a rotten ladder. I started to work in a factory but my health prevented me from continuing and there were all sorts of problems at home. I was thinking very negatively and was even thinking of suicide.

After some time I worked as an assistant in a pre-primary school and followed a course at the same time. I decided to take control of my life and wanted to open a pre-primary school. My mother gave me a piece of land and my determination was so strong that I did in fact open my own pre-primary school on my own land.

Although I was not married, I was happy to have so many children to care for and I gave them all the love and affection that I could. I am proud to say that one of them is a doctor today.

During the bi-election of 2002, I met three fantastic ladies: Bunwaree, Juggoo and Babooram. I admired them so much that I told them so and they encouraged me to join the Labour Party. I also joined the Women's League and was soon given the responsibility to represent the Women's League of my party in my constituency. I worked for the bi-election and did door-to-door campaigning, distributed electoral manifestos in every single house, shop and public place from La Maury, Mare d'Australia, Depinay to Pojnt Prallia. I was so happy as I felt that I was doing something worthwhile. I met lots of people and made friends. I proved myself and became a good political activist. I valued myself.

I became well known in my region and all the political meetings that I organised were successful. I was then chosen by the leader of the party, Navin Ramgoolam himself to become a member of the Executive Committee of the Labour Party. I was so proud. I will always be grateful to him for giving me the chance to believe in myself. I have lots of respect for him.

My worst experience was with a member of parliament for whom I worked during the 2005 general elections. For him, caste is the order of the day and he has let me down and has done nothing to help me. The Prime Minister should have done something. I wanted to stand as candidate for the Village Election and he was against the idea and sent people to dissuade me. I wonder if men will help women.

When I worked for the party and for the elections I did not ask for anything in return even though I had financial problems. The bank took my piece of land. But God is great and I saw the light at the end of the tunnel. To be able to do politics we need solidarity among women.

GENDER IN THE 2010 MAURITIUS ELECTIONS

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