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# 'The 50:50 campaign was a success'

Norway is one of the donors who supported the May 19 elections, especially the 50:50 campaign for more women representation in Parliament. Montfort Misunje spoke to Norwegian Ambassador to Malawi Bjørn Johannessen to assess the campaign.

**Q:** As a donor, what is your assessment of the 50:50 campaign?

**A:** It all depends on what was expected, not only what was hoped for. My assumption is that some people behind the campaign were disappointed, especially the large number of women that lost, but from a realistic point of view one should see the campaign as mostly successful. The campaign was managed in a very rigorous manner to raise awareness on the need for increased women participation in Parliament, and in Malawian politics in general. And most importantly, the number of female representatives in Parliament increased by more than 50 percent from 14 percent to 22 percent. So, yes this was a success, especially when we know that in many districts women did not compete on equal terms with men.

**Q:** How can that be success when the percentage of women who made it is nowhere near the targeted 50 percent?

**A:** Because sometimes a success, or at least a partial success, does not mean that you totally reach what you are aiming at. You have to see what was achieved in a broader context, which goes beyond some single figures or percentages. This was only the fourth multi-party election in Malawi, you need to keep in mind that in most countries, Norway included, the fight for more gender-related representation in politics has taken a long time, and is ongoing!

**Q:** Your government spent some resources in the campaign through government and NGOs, were the resources used to your expectations?

**A:** I'm glad that the Norwegian government decided to support the efforts for increased female representation in Parliament, and during the campaign we had constructive cooperation and dialogue with various stakeholders. Although significant results were

achieved, there is a need for an assessment; on the experiences, what could have been done in an even better way? My embassy has started the process of assessing our support, and hopefully this will give us some valuable lessons which may benefit further strategies in this field and improve on a possible 2014 campaign. At the end of the day, this is not for Norway or any other country to interfere in Malawian politics; it is about enhancing dignity and gender equality in a society where women make up more than half of the population!

**Q:** Some women aspirants complained that they did not receive some of the materials such as campaign T-shirts and money, others said they received them too late to have some impact. Did you receive those reports?

**A:** I'm aware of these complaints, and during the campaign the embassy initiated meetings with relevant actors to address these and other issues. But the embassy only provided funding and the implementation was the challenge for government agencies, UNDP and NGOs. I'm,

however, sure that the various assessments of the campaign will also focus on how such issues should best be tackled in future.

**Q:** Now that the 50:50 target has not been achieved, what should the women do to have their interests taken care of in Parliament?

**A:** I'm not in a position to tell the new Members of Parliament how to act, but, with pleasure, I take note of the fact that many of the new female MPs have a solid professional background, not



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only from politics. I feel confident that this professionalism and their experiences from various parts of Malawian society give them the potential of contributing to changing Parliament into a much more active and constructive way than was the case before the elections. In this regard, the main challenges for the Members of Parliament will not be to act as either women or men, but to act for the benefit of the people who gave them confidence and trust through the elections. In this regard, it is also of great significance that Malawi now has a female Vice-President. The embassy will now consider how we, in a best way, will be able to follow up our endeavours so far.

**Q:** Apart from the issue of women, what is your comment on the conduct and results of the elections?

**A:** I think in general Malawians should be commended for the enthusiasm they displayed in these elections. On the voting day, I visited four polling stations and was impressed with the way the elections were organised, and people's dedication and patience. Like in most elections, minor irregularities and some logistical constraints were identified, but in general MEC as well as UNDP and the civil society and their partners should be saluted for a job well done.