Introduction

Women’s representation and participation in political parties and processes requires examination. South Africa is signatory to the 2008 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which commits member states to put in place measures to bring about 50% representation for women in decision-making positions by 2015. Despite this commitment however, CGE research points to poor representation of women in positions of leadership. In addition, there is evidence of gender insensitivity and lack of gender transformation within political parties, and inadequate internal policies and programmes to promote and support women, and address issues such as sexual harassment.

The CGE has developed a spectrum of activities to surface issues relating to gender equality, women’s political representation, and municipal gender mainstreaming and service delivery, in relation to the forthcoming local government elections, as well as secure party commitments to promoting gender equality, and promote 50/50 legislation. The CGE supports proactive measures such as legislated quota to ensure women’s equal representation in politics and government.

Accordingly, the CGE and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) convened a national political party dialogue on 15 April 2011. As a public platform this brought together leaders of key political parties, stakeholders in the gender equality sector, media representatives and ordinary women and men, to deliberate on the responsiveness of political parties’ manifestos and campaigns to issues relating to gender equality and the enhancement of the status of women. Under scrutiny as well was political parties’ promotion of gender equality and women’s representation,
through their practice and party lists, and commitment to the principle of 50/50 representation.

**Women’s political representation**
Advocate Pansy Tlakula, IEC Chief Electoral Officer, highlighted trends in women’s political participation and representation across South Africa’s national and provincial elections. With women comprising the majority of South Africa’s population, as well as the majority of registered voters, it was disturbing to note that this has not translated into women’s equal representation as party candidates and public representatives. Advocate Tlakula indicated that for the 2011 local government elections, women comprise 37% of proportional representative party lists - despite the recommendation in the Municipal Structures Act that parties should “seek to ensure” that 50% of their PR candidates are women, and that these are evenly distributed on the list. These findings indicate a clear need for legislation on 50/50, as policy guidelines and voluntary quota systems are not having the desired impact.

**Gender and local government**
The CGE shared findings from its gender and local government elections research, which included an analysis of the gender mainstreaming of political party manifestos and preliminary analysis of women’s representation on party lists; an analysis of gender mainstreaming of a sample of Municipal Integrated Development Plans (IDPs); an assessment of the implementation of the Local Government Gender Policy Framework; and findings from the CGE’s Millenium Development Goals (MDG) survey relating to gender equality and local government service delivery on key gender and development issues, water, housing and sanitation.

*Party manifestos*
The CGE examined the election manifestos of the ANC, COPE, DA, IFP, and the UDM, to assess any commitments to gender equality, and found that in the main, parties have not mainstreamed gender throughout their proposed interventions. The focus of most manifestos is on service delivery issues, but no gender lens has been applied to these, or specific reference made to their proposed impact on women.

In addition, as part of a collaborative intervention together with Sonke Gender Justice, the CGE, and People Opposed to Women Abuse; Tshwaranang, a local NGO focusing on gender-based violence, undertook an analysis of the extent to which parties addressed gender-based violence, HIV and AIDS in their manifestos, as two key issues impacting most on women. Tshwaranang refers to practical measures
that could be undertaken at municipal level to address these issues, including prevention and awareness-raising measures, improved access to treatment and services, and improving public safety and support – all of which are suggested in the apparently neglected local government Gender Policy Framework adopted in 2007.

Tshwaranang found that generally, the ANC, DA and UDM outline measures to deal with HIV and AIDS, while COPE does not refer to this specifically, but deals with health broadly. Both the ANC and the DA aim to raise public awareness around HIV and AIDS. The ANC, COPE, DA and the UDM propose various measures to combat crime, such as increased visibility and distribution of SAPS, the training of police officers, the initiation of street and neighbourhood interventions, and the provision of safe houses and shelters for survivors of gender-based violence.

Gender mainstreaming of IDPs
In terms of the Municipal Systems Act, the municipal IDP is identified as the principal strategic planning and budgeting instrument, which guides and informs all municipal planning and developmental initiatives, and serves as blueprint for local service delivery, over period of 5 years. The process comprises a local situation analysis; developing future visions; the formulation of development strategies and programmes of action; and implementation of monitoring and evaluation methods, with public participation throughout this process. With the intended focus of IDPs on service delivery, local economic development and job creation, environmental and health issues, and land use and urban integration, the IDP is a critical tool to addressing issues predominantly impacting on poor women.

In addition, the concept of development local government envisaged by the White Paper on Local Government, requires municipalities to promote social and economic development. Accordingly, several key international commitments undertaken by the State, through obligations outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the MDGs and the Beijing Platform for Action, have a direct implication for municipalities. For example, the following gendered aspects of MDG targets should be addressed in municipal IDPs: the provision of energy, access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and improvement in the lives of those living in informal settlements.

The CGE enquiry into gender mainstreaming of IDPs focuses on the extent to which the gendered needs of communities, and constitutional and legislative prescripts inform and are prioritised in a sample of IDPs. The CGE interest centres on the gendered aspects of poverty, inequality and
local social and economic development. In the main, findings reveal that very few municipalities appear to realise the importance of mainstreaming gender in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their programmes. Few consider gender in their operational plans, noting for instance how the particular needs of vulnerable groups and women in particular will be addressed through service provision, such as the provision of electricity, water and sanitation.

Overall, IDPs do not address gender mainstreaming in service delivery planning, do not refer to the National Gender Policy Framework, the Gender Policy Framework for local government, or any municipal gender policy, and do not refer to gender equality or women’s empowerment. Targets set and data captured are not gender disaggregated – for example, no targets are set for the number of households and beneficiaries, disaggregated by gender, targeted for district poverty alleviation interventions, making monitoring and evaluation of these interventions difficult. There appear to be few programmes and budget for gender equality awareness-raising at the municipality level, while some districts report dysfunctional gender structures.

On the positive side, some districts give priority to the recruitment and selection of women and people with disabilities in addressing municipalities’ own employment equity, and have special programmes for women, youth and people with disabilities. Some districts have developed district gender policy and strategies, while there is some evidence of district plans to address issues of women in all strategic objectives and programmes, such as education, skills transfer, capacity building. Some districts note the importance of prioritizing the needs of women, youth and people with disabilities, and have budgeted for this. A few municipalities have shown some commitment to addressing issues impacting on women, youth and people with disabilities, and mention their involvement in programming. Others recognize that certain categories of the population should receive priority for certain services, but assumptions must be made about the extent to which these are mainstreamed into programme implementation process.

The research findings question the opportunities for and impact of input by community women into municipal IDP formulation, and the ability of existing public participation processes to enable their meaningful participation. There is also a clear need for the training of municipal stakeholders on gender mainstreaming, understanding and applying the local government Gender Policy Framework and relevant commitments in international and regional protocols and conventions, and ensuring the development of gender disaggregated targets and data collection.
Parties' inputs and responses:
Party representatives at the dialogue did commit to the prioritising of the interests of vulnerable persons at ward level, such as women, people with disabilities, youth and the elderly. Parties did refer to specific anti-poverty measures, and interventions to raise awareness around HIV and AIDS, combat gender-based violence and ensure women benefit from local economic development opportunities. In the lively panel discussion that followed, parties provided greater detail on their interventions to address the interests of youth and people with disabilities, as well as respond to the particular needs of women in rural areas, and those living in situations of poverty.

With regard to women’s political representation and the issue of 50/50, only the ANC and UDM reported that their parties are committed to implementing a 50/50 quota system. Party representatives deliberated extensively the issue of women’s inadequate representation, speaking to measures put in place to recruit women with potential, build their capacity through skills training interventions, and the creation of women’s desks and forums.

All parties were in agreement that the greatest challenge remains the legacy of patriarchy, in overcoming entrenched attitudes and perception relating to women’s leadership. This prevents parties from putting forward women candidates, prevents women from standing for nomination, and men and women from voting for women candidates. Questions were raised on the value of a quota system, whether this constitutes a token measure that sets women up for failure, or whether this leverages the recruitment and appointment of women to positions of leadership, to transform political institutions and challenge these mindsets.

Conclusion
The task for political parties is clear, to demonstrate their commitment to addressing women’s political representation and participation, and issues impacting on women. We need to see a transformation of party candidate lists and leadership structures, challenging patriarchal attitudes and resistance to women’s political leadership. Parties need to pay greater attention to surfacing and addressing gender in their manifestos, to outline how they propose to promote gender equality, address gendered needs and enhance the lives of women. Election candidates should be grilled on these issues by members of the public, and successful appointees held to account for delivering substantively on commitments.
Municipalities and COGTA need to address the evident shortcomings in gender mainstreaming of IDPs, and poor implementation of the gender policy framework. This will require a range of measures to ensure compliance and accountability, capacity-building and awareness, the creation of engendered targets and data collection, and monitoring and evaluation systems to track these. There is also a need for greater awareness of the implications of international instruments, and the gendered obligations imposed on municipalities relating to service provision, which ought to be addressed in municipal IDPs and budgets.

The CGE will be campaigning for the adoption of 50/50 legislation to ensure women’s equal representation, as it is evident that legislative recommendations and voluntary quota systems are not having the desired impact, and South Africa will not meet the SADC 2015 target. Women’s equal representation and participation in the political arena is essential to changing the patriarchal nature of political and governance structures and approaches to policy formulation, and enabling diverse views and solutions to the many challenges besetting democracy and development in South Africa. These keep women marginalised out of decision-making processes, at the receiving end of “empowerment” programmes, and locked in unequal power relations that determine access to resources and the achievement of human dignity.

Janine Hicks
20 April 2011