

West African Women Politicians Struggle to Get Elected

By Nico Colombant

Dakar

14 June 2007

[Watch West African Women report / Real broadband - download](#) 

[Watch West African Women report / Real broadband](#) 

[Watch West African Women report / Real dialup - download](#) 

[Watch West African Women report / Real dialup](#) 

Women politicians in West Africa are trying to follow the lead of Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to reach high elected positions, but many are finding it difficult. VOA's Nico Colombant has covered recent elections throughout West Africa and has this report from our regional bureau in Dakar.

Last year's inauguration of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Monrovia was both touching and historic.

The former finance minister became Africa's first elected female president. Festivities rang in the occasion to celebrate the new rein of the politician Liberians call "Mama Ellen."

In Mali recently, a woman candidate, Sidibe Aminata Diallo, tried to imitate this success. Her party's name, the Movement for Environmental Education and Sustainable Development, summed up her platform.

She was the first woman candidate in a Malian presidential election. "It is a challenge in a Muslim country, in a country where traditionally women do not play a forward role, where our place is more at home and in keeping traditions going."

The professor of development and town planning fared dismally at the polls. She got less than one percent of the vote.

Many women, like Djeneba Diallo -- no relation to the candidate -- voted for the incumbent and winner, Amadou Toumani Toure. "In all honesty, I do not know her very well," she said. "But it is really good in our society for a woman to be candidate. I am really proud of her."

One of the few Diallo supporters, Sangare Awa Mariko, said the election marked a step in the fight for women's rights. "I know she has been the first. And after that, I know that there are other women here in Mali. Next time, they will do like her. And we are going to support them, we have to support them. Women have to support them, men have to support them, everybody. We have to push every woman to be like her so one day we will have a president who will try to fight for our case."

In Senegal, ahead of recent legislative elections, there was an effort to pass a gender parity law



Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf



Many African women weigh the advancement of women politicians with how they stand on issues

that would guarantee a certain number of assembly seats to women.

The proposal never passed. Many women politicians in West Africa are appointed ministers of culture, health or women's issues, but very few are ever elected as legislators.



**Pemba Mbow, former
Senegalese minister of culture**

Pemba Mbow is a former Senegalese minister of culture, who has run for local government offices, but has failed to get elected. Still, she is against parity laws.

"We need to be very careful," she says. "This is the reason why I disagree with the law of parity. Because we need a consolidation of the position of women in the society, everywhere, in institutions, but not putting women and manipulating them, because our society is changing very, very, deeply."

So it may be a while until the scenes in Liberia of women celebrating Ellen Johnson Sirleaf are repeated.

President Sirleaf has promised a lot in war-torn Liberia, so her performance, if successful, may well encourage more women to run and more voters to elect them.

Print