

**SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

**PERCEPTIONS OF DELEGATES OF THE SPECIFIC APPOINTMENT OF WOMEN AS DELEGATES TO THE MULTI PARTY NEGOTIATIONS PROCESS**

by: Martheanne Finnemore, Industrial Relations Unit, UPE.

Under pressure from the women's lobby group, the negotiating council agreed in March 1992 to appoint an additional delegate to the negotiating teams of each party/organisation participating in the negotiations. This provided for two delegates and two advisors per team. The agreement reached was that one of the delegates, with full speaking status, had to be a woman.

**Research objective**

The decision to appoint women delegates attracted considerable attention as it was the first time in South Africa that such an initiative at such a level had been undertaken. In essence, the appointment of women delegates could be described as a form of affirmative action. Not all parties were in favour of such appointment and there appeared to be some scepticism about the appointment of women as delegates. An evaluation of the appointment of women delegates by the participants in the negotiating council was thus considered a valuable research opportunity. The objective of the research was to evaluate the negotiating council participants' perception of the appointment and performance of women delegates.

**Survey - questionnaire method**

A survey, by means of a self administered questionnaire, was conducted during August 1993 to assess the perceptions of men and women delegates to the multiparty negotiating process. The research was conducted after the talks had been in process for five months, but before the end of the negotiations so that full participation could be encouraged and feedback given. The questionnaire contained 34 attitudinal questions scored on a five point Likert scale and several open ended questions.

**Responses received**

Forty six questionnaires were completed - eighteen by female delegates and 28 by male delegates and advisors. As 23 organisations were participating at the time, approximately 92 persons formed the potential total population. The response rate was thus 50 percent. It is interesting to note that most of the male delegates were politicians or lawyers, while most of the women were in the caring professions eg. education, social work and nursing.



## Summary of findings

### - Overall perception of the process

It was reported that 63 percent of participants believed that their organisations, at the outset of the process, were strongly in favour of the appointment of women delegates while 15 percent were partly in favour. Altogether 78 percent of respondents' organisations were generally in favour of the affirmative action. But, only 43 percent of male delegates were personally strongly in favour of the appointment of women delegates at the beginning and 11 percent were firmly against such appointment.

It appears then that many men did not wholly agree with their organisations stand point on the issue at the beginning.

However, by August 1993, the number of males who strongly or partly supported such appointment grew from sixty eight percent to eighty six percent, and there were no longer any males who stated that they were against such appointment.

Overall, eighty seven percent of men and women respondents were strongly or partly in agreement with the specific inclusion of women as delegates to the multi party negotiations. Among both male and female delegates there had been an increase in support for the appointment of women delegates from attitudes held at the outset of the talks. Women shifted from 67 percent being strongly in agreement to 78 percent strongly agreeing. Only one woman still disagreed with the special appointment of women as delegates.

### - Contribution to debate

While the majority of both male and female delegates perceived that women had made an equal contribution to that of males to the debates, male delegates were more positive than the female delegates about this contribution. Seventy five percent of male delegates strongly or partly agreed that women made a contribution equal to that of male delegates, while only 61 percent of females perceived that the contribution was equal. It appears that women may have undervalued their performance.

### - Problem areas in appointment of women delegates

Various other questions revealed both positive and negative aspects of the appointment of women delegates. In general, two groups of women delegates could be identified i.e. those who were permanent in status and appointed on merit and were seen to have made a major contribution, while others who were rotated or appointed as tokens, were perceived as contributing little and detracting from the performance of women in general. These issues are highlighted in the responses to the open ended questions discussed later.



- Perceptions of discrimination against women

There was some indication that some male chairpersons had discriminated against women delegates. Interestingly, 39 percent of women delegates perceived such discrimination and 25 percent of male delegates. Some discriminatory behaviour was therefore present in the negotiating council.

An overbearing attitude by a few male delegates preventing their female co-delegates from fully participating was also noted. Responses to the open ended questions gave some indication of the manner of this discrimination:

- \* some male delegates determine what, when and whether their female delegates can speak,
- \* in some cases the male delegate believes he should be the chief negotiator and main contributor to the debate and thus inhibits the contribution of his colleague,
- \* some male delegates did not believe that their co-delegates could contribute therefore virtually ignored them as they did not really want them there - some women then had to go it alone until they established themselves and won the respect of their own party and the council.

On the other hand, in response to questions concerning their experiences within their negotiating teams, most women reported that they felt included as part of the team, their contributions were valued and that they got on well with all members. Discrimination was therefore not universal and was experienced differently according to specific circumstances existing within each negotiating team. Obvious discriminatory practices have also tended to decrease as male delegates have become more gender sensitive.

- Gender issues

Seventy four percent of all delegates strongly agreed and seventeen percent partly agreed that women were doing everything they could to address gender issues in the council. Compared with responses to other questions, this question elicited the highest "strongly agree" response among the males and shared the most positive response among females with two other questions. There is no doubt that the participants within the council perceived women to be pursuing women's interests vigorously. It should also be noted however that not all women were perceived to be interested in promoting women's interests, and that some divisions among the women were evident in their responses.



## ● Impact on affirmative action for women

Overall, eighty one percent of respondents agreed strongly or partly agreed that the appointment of women delegates to the multiparty negotiating process would have a major impact on affirmative action programs in the country. There was no apparent difference in the perception of this impact between male and female delegates. One male delegate wrote that "the long term impact would be to nail the assumption that women are politically inferior".

### - Perception of media reporting of women's participation

The majority of both male and female delegates believed that the media had not given a fair representation of the contribution of women delegates at the negotiations. Interestingly, 64 percent of the male delegates strongly perceived this to be the case, while 50 percent of the women delegates fell into this category. Overall, 72 percent of the delegates strongly or partly disagreed with the statement that the media had given a fair representation of the participation of the women at the talks.

### - Responses to open ended questions on performance

The following reasons were given for a positive attitude towards the appointment of women delegates.

- \* Women have insight and have made relevant contributions, - they argue logically and don't engage in repetition, like males do,
- \* don't talk just to please others
- \* have strong arguments and make persuasive points,
- \* no less assertive than men,
- \* participation has enriched the process,
- \* advocate balanced viewpoints,
- \* some are intellectuals,
- \* contribute towards general consensus,
- \* some have humour,
- \* more patient,
- \* persevere more than men,
- \* make discussions more thorough,
- \* without their participation some rights would not be addressed,
- \* gender issues are protected and promoted,
- \* best contribution made if permanent and regular delegate,
- \* women delegates are a living example of equality.
- \* women who carry weight have made an impact as people, not as women
- \* presence of women has lowered male antagonism towards one another



Reasons given for a negative attitude towards the appointment of women delegates and problems arising from the appointment.

- \* Women have been historically excluded and politics is therefore a man's domain and they are politically inexperienced,
- \* women are less experienced thus confirming male perceptions of incapability,
- \* women by virtue of the fact that are not as senior as the male delegate in their organisation are not seen to carry any weight,
- \* some women not appointed on merit but rather as tokens and on the basis of nepotism,
- \* rotation of female delegates by some parties has rendered them ineffective as they have not been capable of participating,
- \* some bills have been highly technical and contributions from women delegates have been weak,
- \* some women have been too unsure of themselves and have not participated,
- \* the affirmative action appointment of women delegates which has resulted in several cases of tokenism may negatively affect affirmative action in general,
- \* there is no reason why women should have been singled out for special treatment - they deserve equal treatment - not better.

Several delegates perceived that the appointment of women delegates was a fundamental necessity and would have an impact on the future of the country:

- \* Women have been denied rights for too long and have a fundamental right to participate,
- \* nation building requires combined effort, irrespective of sex,
- \* women delegates would provide role models for younger women,
- \* male delegates have been made more gender sensitive
- \* women must be exposed and gain experience - the future of S.A. must not be male dominated,
- \* good potential for future leadership has developed.

In the section relating to the women's own perceptions of the experience of being appointed a delegate, approximately half indicated they had not been fully prepared for inclusion in the talks. But, the majority perceived they had been included as part of their negotiating teams and had received feedback from their parties on their performance. Most women indicated they had received strong support from other women in the negotiating council. Some indicated that they realised they could have made more of a contribution if they had more knowledge and one delegate was motivated to study further. Most described the experience as a positive and challenging learning experience, which had made them more determined and they valued the opportunity to shape the future of the country.



## Conclusion

The affirmative action appointment of women as delegates to the multiparty negotiations process, while attracting criticism from some quarters at the time, is now accepted as a successful or partly successful initiative by 87 percent of the delegates to the council. A shift towards a more positive perception was especially notable among male delegates.

However, several problems were revealed by the research interalia, the token appointment of women and their rotation by several delegations, as well as the lack of preparation for the negotiations. This is an underlying problem of any quota system of affirmative action and has the potential to undermine such initiatives. Some discrimination against women delegates by male delegates and chairpersons was also revealed in the responses.

But, despite these obstacles, many women were perceived as being appointed on merit and as making a valuable contribution to the debates and playing an influential role in the council. Gender issues were seen as been vigorously promoted. Overall, women appeared more critical of their own performance than male delegates.

Unfortunately, the media was not perceived by men and women as portraying the performance of women delegates in a fair manner. This may be due to the fact that the problems of tokenism discussed above were glaringly obvious at the outset of the talks, whereas many capable women first had to "find their feet" before their potential for contribution could be realised.

The inclusion of the sub-council on women under the Transitional Executive Council and the rights of three women from the sub-council to attend meetings of the TEC and have speaking rights, has further indicated the potential for the enhancement of women's rights in the future. In addition, shortly after the research had been completed, two women were appointed to the panel of chairpersons and another two women were appointed to the planning committee. Women were thus seen to be playing a role beyond that of promoting women's rights. The affirmative action initiative, in spite of some problems inherent in the appointment of women delegates, has illustrated that such programs can contribute significantly towards a culture of non sexism in South Africa.