

FEMINIST VIEW OF POLITICAL PARTIES

MAY 2019

WOMEN FORWARD: ON THE RISE?

Women Forward, is one of the few women-led political parties contesting the upcoming 2019 elections that has no track record of governance. From the onset, Women Forward aims to be an intersectional party that names patriarchy and recognises the challenges facing LGBTQI people, disabled women and poor women. However, it is to be noted that it fails to name capitalist norms that hinder women's access to basic services and their living standards.

WF realistically recognises themselves a possible opposition to government and frames its manifesto as a set of demands on government.

What is commendable about the Women Forward party is that they make use of a bottom up approach whereby they aim to ensure that women are active participants in the economy by creating 'community development forums that will work for the women and children' in areas where women live and advocating for women leadership at all levels.

They note that the system of oppression can only be dismantled once women have the freedom to self-determine what their issues are. This provides women with the power to actively contribute and have their views heard, however this must be followed by having more women leadership in critical decision-making positions in government, which the party aims to combat by having gender parity by 2025.

Women Forward takes a strong line on their commitment to ending all violence against women and girls and demand that government enforce laws against perpetrators of domestic violence. While WF take a strong line gender-based violence, they miss the mark by not addressing specifically the high levels of GBV in schools and universities.

The party makes no distinction of the different realities affecting schooling of boys and girls but do advocate for 'robust sex education' to boys and girls in order to reduce the rate of teenage pregnancies, however there is no support programme for pregnant girls and young mothers. There are no targets around early childhood development.

WF acknowledge corrective rape and marginalisation based on sexual orientation. The party assures voters that perpetrators of ritualistic hate crimes will face the full might of the law. The manifesto is strong in commitments to addressing women's vulnerability in conflict areas, committing to supporting peace and stability. It is not clear if this extends to women who face xenophobic attacks within South Africa.

WF rightfully proposes the enforcement of constitutional provisions and specific responses for different groups of women including women with disabilities, widowed, elderly women and single mothers – but the manifesto doesn't provide more detail on what programmes would be put in place to address the context of each of these groups. WF is silent on sex work, domestic work and women farm workers, leaving out a critical group of women that often bear the brunt of the worst human rights injustices.

The manifesto misses the mark on providing direction of how they will end poverty, review economic policies and ensure that women are active participants in all levels of economic decision-making.

The party strongly identifies the lack of land ownership by women and thus purports to work towards providing lease security, stabilising rent control, the elimination of informal settlements and discriminatory bank lending practices.

Regarding traditional leadership and women in rural areas, WF plan to challenge cultural practices that discriminate against women, by engaging with government and traditional leaders. What is surprising is the lack of position on controversial pieces of legislation such as the Traditional Courts Bill and the Traditional and Khoisan Leadership Bill.

Overall WF have very strong positions on the issues they focus on, and the manifesto has attempted to address critical concerns of women. If the party were to get a seat in Parliament, the question would be how they would use their strong voice to impact on male-dominated decision making.

With no track record in government, and as with many of the smaller parties, limited information is available in the public space about WF. We could not access more information about the party, including its previous manifestos or constitution.