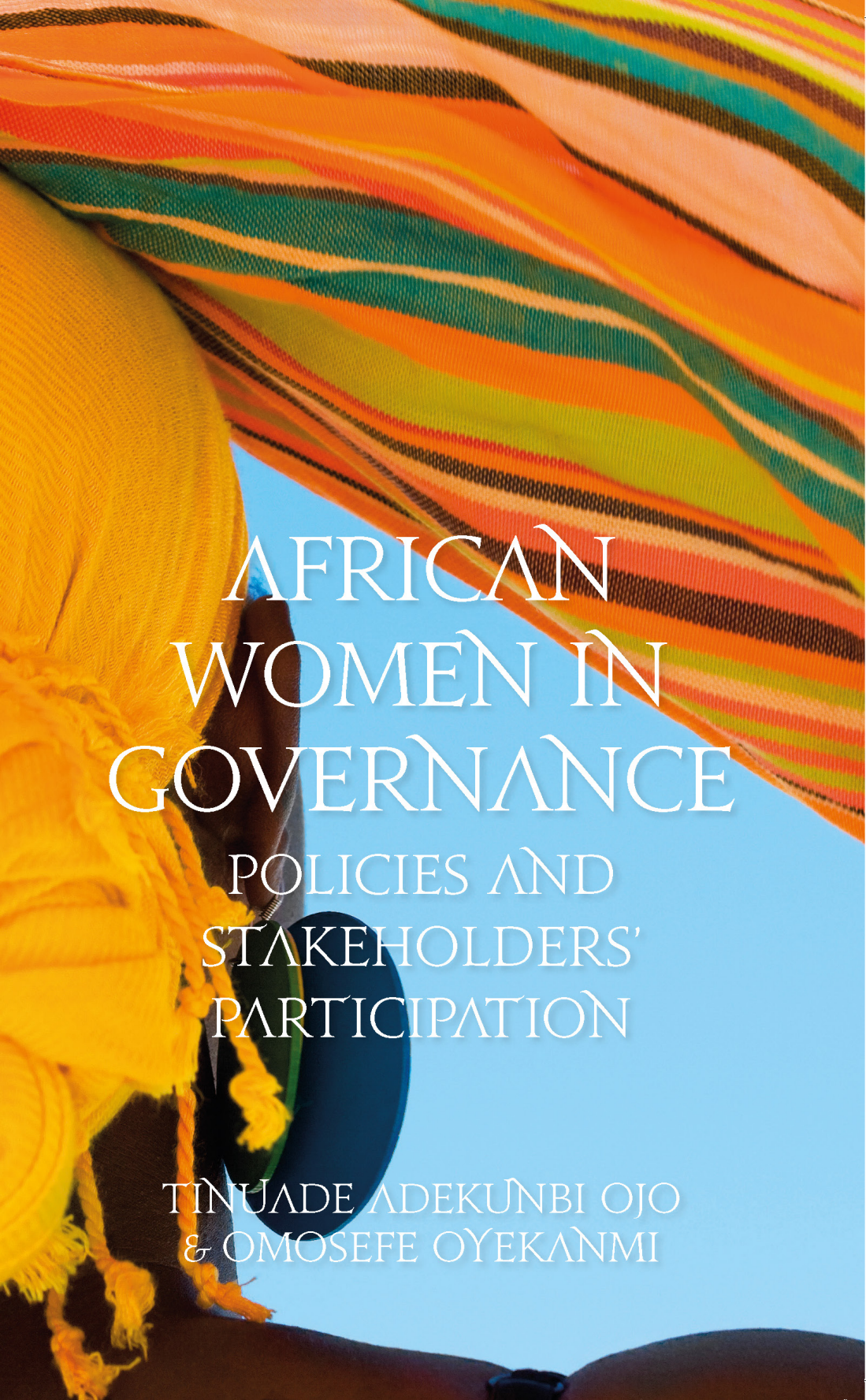




# AFRICAN WOMEN IN GOVERNANCE

POLICIES AND  
STAKEHOLDERS'  
PARTICIPATION

TINUJADE ADEKUNBI OJO  
& OMOSEFE OYEKANMI







# African Women in Governance

## Policies and Stakeholders' Participation

Tinuade Adekunbi Ojo & Omosefe Oyekanmi (Eds)



UJ Press

*African Women in Governance: Policies and Stakeholders' Participation*

Published by UJ Press  
University of Johannesburg  
Library  
Auckland Park Kingsway Campus  
PO Box 524  
Auckland Park  
2006  
<https://ujpress.uj.ac.za/>

Compilation © Tinuade Adekunbi Ojo & Omosefe Oyekanmi 2025

Chapters © Author(s) 2025

Published Edition © Tinuade Adekunbi Ojo & Omosefe Oyekanmi 2025

First published 2025

<https://doi.org/10.64449/9781997468394>

978-1-997468-38-7 (Paperback)

978-1-997468-39-4 (PDF)

978-1-997468-40-0 (EPUB)

978-1-997468-41-7 (XML)

This publication had been submitted to a rigorous double-blind peer-review process prior to publication and all recommendations by the reviewers were considered and implemented before publication.

Proofreading: Mike Leisegang

Cover design: Hester Roets, UJ Graphic Design Studio

Typeset in 9/13pt Merriweather Light



# Contents

|                                                                                                                                                          |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Editorial Foreword .....                                                                                                                                 | i   |
| <i>Sven Botha</i>                                                                                                                                        |     |
| Abbreviations .....                                                                                                                                      | 1   |
| Synopsis .....                                                                                                                                           | 5   |
| <i>Tinuade Adekunbi Ojo, Omosefe Oyekanmi</i>                                                                                                            |     |
| <b>Chapter One:</b> An Overview of African Women in Governance:<br>Policies and Stakeholders' Participation .....                                        | 23  |
| <i>Tinuade Adekunbi Ojo</i>                                                                                                                              |     |
| <b>Chapter Two:</b> 'You Belong to the Other Room': Women and<br>Gendering Democratisation in Africa .....                                               | 61  |
| <i>Olayide Oladeji, Samuel Babatola Ayiti, Olusola Olasupo</i>                                                                                           |     |
| <b>Chapter Three:</b> Parliamentary Female Representation and<br>Party Candidate Selection Methods in Zambia .....                                       | 87  |
| <i>Biggie Joe Ndambwa, Aaron Wiza Siwale</i>                                                                                                             |     |
| <b>Chapter Four:</b> The Nexus between Women's Gender<br>Quotas and Political Representation: A Comparative<br>Analysis of South Africa and Rwanda ..... | 111 |
| <i>Refilwe Motseta, Tinuade A Ojo</i>                                                                                                                    |     |

|                                                                                                                                                                            |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Chapter Five:</b> Women's Political Representation and Participation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature: Prospects, Consequences, and Implications .....        | 133 |
| <i>Tafadzwa Clementine Maramura, Torque Mude, Mzoleli Mrara, Stellah Lubinga</i>                                                                                           |     |
| <b>Chapter Six:</b> The Gender Equality Bill, Political Chauvinism and the Quality of Women's Representation in Nigerian Politics .....                                    | 165 |
| <i>Omosefe Oyekanmi, Kafilah Gold, Antonia Taiye Simbine</i>                                                                                                               |     |
| <b>Chapter Seven:</b> Achieving SDG5 in the Fourth Industrial Revolution through Women's Participation in Politics and Economic Governance in Africa .....                 | 191 |
| <i>Alison Nyaradzo Zuva, Paul Tichaona Mushonga</i>                                                                                                                        |     |
| <b>Chapter Eight:</b> African Union and the Development of a Continental Gender Quota in Africa .....                                                                      | 225 |
| <i>Zainab Monisola Olaitan</i>                                                                                                                                             |     |
| <b>Chapter Nine:</b> African Women's Land Rights Struggle in Traditional Societies .....                                                                                   | 251 |
| <i>Lesego Louisah Mosweu, Tinuade Adekunbi Ojo</i>                                                                                                                         |     |
| <b>Chapter Ten:</b> Enhancing Women's Participation in Democratic Governance in Sierra Leone .....                                                                         | 279 |
| <i>Maureen Lifongo</i>                                                                                                                                                     |     |
| <b>Chapter Eleven:</b> Women in Leadership and the Promotion of Accountability in Local Governance: Evaluating the Role of Female Leaders in Ekurhuleni Municipality ..... | 305 |
| <i>Beauty Shiviti</i>                                                                                                                                                      |     |



|                                                                  |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Chapter Twelve:</b> Gender and Age Demographics:              |     |
| The Qualitative Decline of the ANC .....                         | 333 |
| <i>Vusi Gumbi</i>                                                |     |
| <b>Chapter Thirteen:</b> Gender Dimensions of COVID-19 and       |     |
| Social Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa .....                        | 353 |
| <i>Cecy Edijala Balogun, Omosefe Oyekanmi</i>                    |     |
| <b>Conclusion:</b> Reflections on African Women in Governance .. | 379 |
| <i>Tinuade Adekunbi Ojo, Omosefe Oyekanmi</i>                    |     |
| Index .....                                                      | 387 |





# Editorial Foreword

Sven Botha 

Department of Political Sciences  
University of Pretoria   
Pretoria, South Africa

*Co-Series Editor: African Political Science and  
International Relations in Focus*

In 2024, a total of 74 national elections were held worldwide, with 17 of these elections having occurred on African soil. Given this frequency, 2024 is rightly dubbed the year of elections or what some have called the election super cycle. Within this setting, teeming with political choices and jostling for political power, women only constitute a quarter of Africa's 13,057 parliamentarians, spanning 26% and 21% of the lower and upper houses of parliament, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

Women remain shockingly underrepresented in Africa's governance architecture. This 13-chapter volume brings together a diverse range of voices from across the African continent to explore the intersection between women and other pressing issues, including female representation in provincial and national legislatures, land rights, technological advancements, and social policy.

It is well understood that in order for interventions to have a positive impact, they must understand and respond to gendered needs and interests. Foregoing these needs and interests will be futile for the advancement of the political, economic, and social development needs of women and girls in Africa. In line with the reality, the editors of this collection have

---

1 Morna, C.L. and Tolmay, S. (Eds). 2024. *Women's Political Participation*. Report. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Stockholm: The International IDEA. Africa Barometer and the International IDEA. [16 November 2025]. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2024-07/womens-political-participation-africa-barometer-2024.pdf>

provided a series of contextual recommendations, including gender-responsive legislation, enhanced leadership capacity development for women, intensified collaboration between state and non-state actors, gender-balanced appointments, and the facilitation of more awareness campaigns. Alongside the urgent need for structural redress, closer collaboration and enhanced advocacy, co-exists the need for scholars and policymakers alike to help the discourse transition from gender-sensitiveness to gender-responsiveness. This volume provides an excellent foundation for facilitating such a transaction. On behalf of the Series Editors, I would like to congratulate the editors and contributors for making a timely contribution to the literature.

# Abbreviations

|          |                                                                            |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4IR      | Fourth Industrial Revolution                                               |
| ACCORD   | African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes                 |
| ACHPR    | African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights                               |
| ADP      | Alliance Democratic Party                                                  |
| AI       | Artificial Intelligence                                                    |
| ANC      | African National Congress                                                  |
| ANCWL    | African National Congress Women's League                                   |
| AU       | African Union                                                              |
| AUC-WGYD | African Union Commission-Women, Gender and Youth Directorate               |
| BFA      | Beijing Platform for Action                                                |
| BPFA     | Beijing Platform for Action                                                |
| CEDAW    | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| CSOs     | Civil Society Organisations                                                |
| CSW      | Commission on the Status of Women                                          |
| DA       | Democratic Alliance                                                        |
| DFID     | Department for International Development                                   |
| DIRCO    | Department of International Relations and Cooperation                      |
| DSG      | Deputy Secretary General                                                   |
| EC       | Eastern Cape                                                               |
| ECZ      | Electoral Commission of Zambia                                             |
| EFF      | Economic Freedom Fighters                                                  |
| EIGE     | European Institute for Gender Equality                                     |
| ESA      | Eastern and Southern Africa                                                |
| EUOM     | European Union Election Observer Mission                                   |
| FGM      | Female Genital Mutilation                                                  |

## African Women in Governance

|                 |                                                                                               |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| FF Plus         | Freedom Front Plus                                                                            |
| FPTP            | First Past the Post                                                                           |
| FWCW            | Fourth World Conference on Women                                                              |
| GBV             | Gender-Based Violence                                                                         |
| GEB             | Gender Equality Bill                                                                          |
| GEWE            | Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment                                                       |
| GOSL            | Government of Sierra Leone                                                                    |
| GWE             | Gender and Women's Empowerment                                                                |
| HTPs            | Harmful Traditional Practices                                                                 |
| ICT             | Information and Communications Technology                                                     |
| IDEA            | International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance                                |
| INEC            | Independent National Electoral Commission                                                     |
| IoT             | Internet of Things                                                                            |
| IPU             | Inter-Parliamentary Union                                                                     |
| Maputo Protocol | Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa |
| MEC             | Member of the Executive Council                                                               |
| MDGs            | Millennium Development Goals                                                                  |
| MK              | <i>Umkhonto we Sizwe</i>                                                                      |
| MOU             | Memorandum of Understanding                                                                   |
| NDC             | National Democratic Congress                                                                  |
| NDI             | National Democratic Institute                                                                 |
| NDR             | National Democratic Revolution                                                                |
| NEC             | National Executive Committee                                                                  |
| NEPAD           | New Economic Partnership for African Development                                              |
| NGOs            | Non-Governmental Organisations                                                                |
| NPP             | New Patriotic Party                                                                           |
| NWC             | National Women's Coalition                                                                    |
| OAU             | Organisation of African Unity                                                                 |

## *Abbreviations*

|            |                                                                                                            |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| OSCE/ODIHR | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe / Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights |
| PA         | Political Associates                                                                                       |
| PLAC       | Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre                                                                           |
| PR         | Proportional Representation                                                                                |
| RPF        | Rwandan Patriotic Front                                                                                    |
| SADC       | Southern African Development Community                                                                     |
| SDG 5      | Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality)                                                           |
| SDGs       | Sustainable Development Goals                                                                              |
| SDGEA      | Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa                                                            |
| SLPP       | Sierra Leone People's Party                                                                                |
| STEM       | Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics                                                          |
| Stats SA   | Statistics South Africa                                                                                    |
| TCB        | Traditional Courts Bill                                                                                    |
| TLGFA      | Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act                                                        |
| TRC        | Truth and Reconciliation Commission                                                                        |
| UDM        | United Democratic Movement                                                                                 |
| UN         | United Nations                                                                                             |
| UN Women   | United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women                                     |
| UNCTAD     | United Nations Conference on Trade and Development                                                         |
| UNDP       | United Nations Development Programme                                                                       |
| UNESCO     | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization                                           |
| UPND       | United Party for National Development                                                                      |
| USAID      | United States Agency for International Development                                                         |
| WEGE       | Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality                                                                    |

## African Women in Governance

|      |                                           |
|------|-------------------------------------------|
| WGDD | Women, Gender and Development Directorate |
| WIPW | Women in Politics Worldwide               |





# Synopsis

**Tinuade Adekunbi Ojo** 

*Centre for Race, Gender and Class  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa*

**Omosefe Oyekanmi** 

*Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC)  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa*

## Introduction

The participation of women in governance plays a crucial role in fostering democratic, egalitarian, and sustainable societies (Agbalajobi, 2010; Simbine & Oyekanmi, 2025). Despite this, data consistently demonstrates that women's representation in leadership positions across Africa remains below parity (Brookings, 2023; UN Women, 2025). While some countries, such as Rwanda, Kenya, and South Africa, have made notable strides in increasing female political representation, gender disparities persist across various economic and political sectors (IMF, 2023). This disparity exists notwithstanding the implementation of global, regional, and national policies aimed at promoting women's rights and ensuring their equal participation in political and economic spheres). According to the 2021 report, Africa's female political representation stands at just 24%, highlighting the ongoing need for targeted interventions (International IDEA, 2021). Factors such as entrenched patriarchy, lack of political will, and restrictive electoral frameworks continue to hinder progress towards gender parity in governance. Addressing these barriers requires concerted efforts from governments and development organisations to empower women and enhance their access to political leadership (Sadie, 2015).

This book conceptualises women's political participation as an inclusive and transformative process. It brings together key debates on policy approaches to women's political involvement, showcasing research and contributions from scholars and experts across Africa. The volume explores significant themes related to gender policies and African states' efforts to address political and economic challenges that influence budget allocations for women-centred programmes and initiatives. Contributions within the book adopt a gender policy-focused approach, offering insights into the structural and systemic factors affecting women's political empowerment.

Africa is a continent characterised by rich cultural and historical diversity, and in recent years, the political landscape has witnessed a growing presence of women in leadership roles. In Rwanda, for example, women hold the majority of parliamentary seats, a transformation driven by post-genocide policies prioritising gender inclusion. Similarly, Kenya's constitutional reforms have paved the way for greater female representation, exemplified by the election of Martha Karua as the first woman to run for deputy president in 2022. From presidents and prime ministers to cabinet ministers and parliamentarians, African women have increasingly assumed positions of influence, contributing to governance and national development (Sadie, 2015). This shift has introduced new perspectives, fresh ideas, and a more balanced approach to decision-making processes.

Likewise, the increasing presence of African women in governance is a testament to their resilience, determination, and commitment to driving meaningful change. Consider Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first elected female head of state, who led Liberia through post-war reconstruction, advocating for women's rights and economic stability. Historically marginalised and excluded from political spaces, women in Africa have challenged these societal norms, defied stereotypes, and surmounted various obstacles to establish their presence in leadership. Their participation not only enhances governance structures but also redefines traditional gender roles in politics.

One of the most significant achievements in this regard is the rising representation of women in parliaments and cabinets across the continent. Many African countries have adopted affirmative action measures and gender quotas to guarantee a minimum level of female representation, resulting in steady progress in political inclusion. These reforms have enabled women to play a more active role in legislative and policymaking processes, advocating for issues that directly impact their communities.

African women leaders have been at the forefront of various social, economic, and political initiatives, championing gender equality, education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development. For example, Malawi's former President, Joyce Banda, prioritised maternal health and women's economic empowerment, demonstrating the tangible impacts of female leadership. Their lived experiences uniquely position them to address these pressing issues and implement policies that reflect the needs of women and marginalised communities. Furthermore, their leadership has extended beyond national boundaries, with African women engaging in regional and international negotiations, advancing peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and regional integration. This is also reflective in their collaborative and empathetic approach to governance, which has earned respect and recognition domestically and globally.

Beyond their individual roles, African women in governance serve as role models and sources of inspiration for younger generations across the continent. Their achievements send a powerful message about the possibilities available to women in political leadership, breaking barriers and motivating future leaders to challenge gender-based limitations. By occupying positions of power, they continue to reshape narratives, dismantle patriarchal structures, and advocate for a more inclusive and equitable society.

In conclusion, the increased participation of African women in governance marks an important transformation in the continent's political landscape. These dynamic leaders

have shattered barriers, defied conventional gender norms, and demonstrated their capabilities as effective policymakers and changemakers. Their contributions span multiple sectors, addressing critical social and economic issues, fostering collaboration, and paving the way for future generations of women leaders. The journey of African women in governance is a powerful testament to their resilience and commitment to shaping a more inclusive and progressive future for Africa. African women's leadership is central to advancing societies, driving inclusive development, and ensuring sustainable governance. Given its profound impact, the role of women in governance demands urgent intellectual attention, policy action, and scholarly engagement to further accelerate gender equity and political transformation across Africa.

### ***Rationale for African Women in Governance: Policies and Stakeholders' Participation***

The empowerment of African women in governance is essential for achieving inclusive leadership and sustainable development across the continent. Considering that governance refers to the processes, structures, and institutions through which authority is exercised, decisions are made, and policies are implemented to manage public affairs, **African women in governance** is the inclusion, leadership, and influence of women in these governance systems across the continent. It involves their participation in political offices, public administration, policymaking, and decision-making processes at local, national, and regional levels.

Recognising this, policymakers have introduced various legal frameworks and initiatives to promote gender equality and increase women's representation in decision-making spaces. Additionally, the role of stakeholders, including governments, civil society organisations (CSOs), international bodies, and the private sector, is crucial in effectively shaping and implementing these policies. These discussions highlight the significance of policy interventions and stakeholder engagement in advancing African women's leadership in governance while identifying

key initiatives, persistent challenges, and recommendations for progress.

This is premised on the fact that women bring diverse perspectives, experiences, and leadership styles that contribute to more comprehensive, equitable, and effective policies. By increasing women's participation in governance, African countries can harness their expertise, foster economic growth, and address social challenges more holistically.

The African Union's *Agenda 2063* (AU, 2013), which outlines specific targets for women's leadership, have implemented legal mandates to ensure women's representation in political leadership. For instance, Uganda and South Africa have successfully introduced gender quotas that have significantly increased women's political representation. Such strategies create pathways for women's leadership and help normalise their presence in governance. These measures provide a strong foundation for institutionalising gender parity in governance, guaranteeing a minimum percentage of women in legislative bodies, political parties, and public administration; however, many countries are still below the global average. Despite significant progress, African women in governance continue to face multiple barriers, including deep-seated gender biases, cultural stereotypes, and structural inequalities. Limited access to financial resources, inadequate institutional support, and restrictive societal norms hinder women's ability to compete for leadership positions on an equal footing.

Therefore, sustained progress in women's governance participation requires continuous investment in leadership development and capacity-building initiatives. These programmes help to bridge the knowledge gap and empower women to engage confidently in governance processes. The empowerment of African women in governance is a critical component of sustainable development and inclusive leadership. By implementing gender-responsive policies, engaging key stakeholders, and addressing systemic barriers, Africa can create an enabling environment for women's meaningful participation in decision-making. Achieving gender equality in governance

will not only benefit women but also contribute to the broader social and economic development of the continent.

In sum, this book seeks to highlight the significance of empowering African women in governance by examining existing policies, legal frameworks, and stakeholder involvement while highlighting the critical role that women play in fostering effective and inclusive leadership. It provides a platform to raise awareness about the barriers that women encounter in accessing leadership positions and decision-making roles, addressing systemic challenges and societal biases that persist.

A thorough analysis of policies and legal frameworks is essential to understanding their influence on women's political participation. By assessing their strengths, limitations, and areas for improvement, this book offers insights and recommendations for enhancing gender-responsive policies that promote women's empowerment and equitable representation in governance. Given the key role of stakeholders such as governments, civil society organisations, international bodies, and the private sector, this book explores their contributions to policy development, implementation, and advocacy efforts. It also emphasises the importance of collaborative approaches in establishing an enabling environment for women's active participation in governance.

Furthermore, the book showcases success stories and best practices that demonstrate the transformative impact of inclusive policies and stakeholder engagement. This book contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive analysis of governance structures, legal provisions, and participatory mechanisms that support women's leadership. It serves as a valuable resource for researchers, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners, offering evidence-based insights into the experiences, challenges, and achievements of women in governance.

Ultimately, this book aspires to empower future generations of women leaders by encouraging them to pursue careers in politics, public administration, and governance. Recognising the necessity of diverse voices in shaping policy

and decision-making, it emphasises the importance of gender-inclusive leadership. By critically examining current realities, sharing impactful narratives, and proposing practical solutions, this book contributes to the broader goal of achieving gender parity and fostering inclusive governance. Such that, together, we can build a future where women's leadership is not merely an ambition but a tangible reality.

## Structure of the Book

*African Women in Governance: Policies and Stakeholders' Participation* presents the assumptions, narratives, and institutions that support the key concepts of women's political participation, policies and stakeholder participation in Africa. In contemporary times, there has been notable emphasis on the involvement of women in governance and the importance of decision-making across Africa. Even so, despite the compelling rationale for women's active participation through processes and several factors, they remain limited in their political engagement. This poses a great challenge to many African countries striving to attain gender parity and ensure that there is meaningful inclusion for women in making political decisions. The several challenges confining women include deep-rooted gender stereotypes, religious influences, and prevailing socio-cultural norms, which perpetuate the patriarchal framework and limit women's empowerment. In addition, at the core of these impediments lies an entrenched patriarchal system which traditionally assumes that men are the main authoritative power in charge of all public decision-making. The themes identified in this book serve as a guide in the compilation of women's role in governance in different parts of Africa and the state-specific profiles on different national approaches to policies for women's governance. The main objective of this volume is to understand different processes that explore the significance of stakeholder participation, including governments, civil society organisations, international bodies, and the private sector, in promoting women's representation and influence in governance. It will also emphasise the need for collaborative efforts to create an inclusive and supportive environment for women's

participation. The book further highlights success stories and best practices in women's participation in governance that can inspire others and demonstrate the positive impact of inclusive policies and stakeholder engagement. By showcasing examples of effective strategies, this book will provide inspiration and practical insights for policymakers, activists, and individuals passionate about promoting gender equality in governance.

The book *African Women in Governance: Policies and Stakeholders' Participation* is an important contribution to the growing body of scholarship that examines the intersection of gender, governance, and development in Africa. Rooted in contemporary socio-political and economic realities, this work interrogates the multifaceted roles, challenges, and opportunities for African women in governance structures across the continent. With a thematic focus spanning political representation, governance and development, political party dynamics, intersectionality, and social policy, the book offers a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on gender and governance.

### **Thematic Focus and Structure**

The book is structured into four thematic areas, each shedding light on critical dimensions of women's engagement in governance. These themes provide a cohesive framework for analysing policies and stakeholder participation, emphasising theoretical insights and practical applications.

#### **1. Women and Political Representation (Chapters 1 to 6)**

The opening thematic area delves into the critical issue of women's political representation. This section interrogates the barriers and facilitators of women's access to political office, analysing the efficacy of gender quotas, electoral reforms, and grassroots mobilisation efforts. Case studies from across the continent illustrate the varying degrees of success in achieving gender parity in political institutions. The chapters emphasise the importance of political representation to ensure that



women's voices influence policy decisions, fostering inclusivity in governance.

## **2. Women's Participation in Governance and Development (Chapters 7 to 11)**

Building upon the foundation of political representation, this thematic area explores the broader participation of women in governance and its implications for sustainable development. It highlights the transformative potential of women's leadership in addressing critical issues such as poverty alleviation, education, healthcare, and climate change. This section draws on empirical data to showcase how women leaders have redefined governance paradigms and prioritised development agendas that align with the lived realities of marginalised populations.

## **3. Political Party Dynamics (Chapter 12)**

Chapter 12 shifts the focus to the internal dynamics of political parties and their impact on women's participation in governance. Political parties are analysed as gatekeepers of power, with their structures and ideologies either enabling or hindering women's inclusion. The chapter explores strategies adopted by women to navigate and influence party politics, such as the formation of women's wings and alliances, and the role of political party policies in promoting gender equity.

## **4. Gender and Social Policy (Chapter 13)**

The final thematic area examines the intersection of gender and social policy, analysing how governance structures influence and are influenced by healthcare, education, labour rights, and social protection policies. This chapter emphasises the role of female policymakers in crafting and implementing gender-responsive policies that address systemic disparities. It also explores the role of civil society and international stakeholders in advocating for and supporting social policy reforms. Chapter 14, the conclusion of this book, *African Women in Governance: Policies and Stakeholders' Participation*, is a reflective synthesis of the key insights and themes explored throughout the chapters.

## 5. Contribution to Scholarship and Practice

This book makes a significant academic and practical contribution to the field of gender and governance studies in Africa. First, it fills a critical gap by offering a comprehensive, multidisciplinary analysis of African women's roles in governance and policymaking. Second, it provides actionable insights for policymakers, civil society actors, and international organisations seeking to enhance women's participation in governance structures. The book bridges the gap between academia and practice by combining theoretical rigour with empirical case studies.

Moreover, the book's intersectional approach ensures that it captures the diversity of African women's experiences, making it a valuable global resource for researchers and practitioners. It challenges dominant narratives that homogenise African women's experiences and instead highlights their agency, resilience, and contributions to governance and development.

*African Women in Governance: Policies and Stakeholders' Participation* is essential for understanding the interplay between gender, governance, and development in Africa. By addressing critical themes such as political representation, governance participation, party dynamics, intersectionality, and social policy, the book advances academic discourse. It provides a road map for enhancing gender equity in governance. This work is poised to inspire further research, advocacy, and action towards inclusive governance systems that reflect the aspirations and rights of African women.

## Breakdown of Chapters

### Theme 1: Women and Political Representation

The first chapter, written by Tinuade A Ojo, *An Overview of African Women in Governance: Policies and Stakeholders' Participation*, provides a foundational framework for understanding the complexities of African women's involvement in governance. It explores the overarching theme of African women in governance, focusing on policies and stakeholder

participation as critical tools for empowerment and inclusion. Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives, the chapter examines the historical context and how policies and multi-stakeholder approaches have influenced women's political representation and their broader role in governance and development.

Chapter 2, on the other hand, explores the view of Olajide Oladeji et al.'s notion of "You Belong to the Other Room": Women and Gendering Democratisation in Africa". According to them, democracy is not only conceivable in terms of democratic institutions but also by citizenship rights, participation and inclusion. Thus, democratic processes must engender equal power distribution and influence between various social groups, especially men and women. Consequently, the empowerment of women and the establishment of gender equality are crucial to democracy.

Chapter 3 focuses on Parliamentary Female Representation and Party Candidate Selection Methods in Zambia by Biggie Ndambwa and Aaron Siwale, debating the chapter that explores the extent to which centralised and decentralised party selection methods contribute to this continued trend and suggests ways of averting the problem in Zambia.

In Chapter 4, Refilwe Motseta and TA Ojo debate the notion of "the Nexus between Women's Gender Quotas and Political Representation: A Comparative Analysis of South Africa and Rwanda". The chapter examines the relationship between gender quotas and women's political representation in South Africa and Rwanda, two African countries that have adopted different approaches to increasing female political participation. The chapter analyses how gender quotas have influenced the number of women in political office, the effectiveness of these quotas in achieving gender parity, and the broader socio-political factors that contribute to women's political empowerment. By comparing the experiences of South Africa and Rwanda, the chapter identifies key lessons for other countries seeking to enhance women's representation in political spheres. The results yield significant insights into the trajectories of South African and Rwandan economies regarding

women's effective political representation and the importance of further research into gender economic policies affecting these economies.

In Chapter 5, Tafadwa Maruma et al. debate "Women's Political Representation and Participation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature: Prospects, Consequences, and Implications". According to them, women's participation in political and decision-making processes has come under the spotlight because of the under-representation of women locally, nationally, and globally in the political arena. Men continue to dominate the political playing field to the detriment and disadvantage of other marginalised groups such as women and young people. Their findings highlight the gender parity in South Africa. While South Africa has, over the years, made substantial strides in the implementation of quotas to encourage women's involvement in politics nationally, there is still a gap and inequalities in the field of local government in which women are marginalised and excluded from politics.

Chapter 6 narrates Omosefe Oyekanmi, Kafilah Gold and Antonia Taiye Simbine's debates on "The Gender Equality Bill (GEB), Political Chauvinism and the Quality of Women's Representation in Nigerian Politics". The chapter examines the GEB in Nigeria, focusing on its implications for women's quality representation and the challenges posed by political chauvinism. It highlights the resistance faced by the Bill, rooted in cultural and religious arguments, which reflect entrenched patriarchal norms shaping societal attitudes towards gender roles. The discussion also situates the GEB within the broader context of African women's struggles for meaningful representation in governance, emphasising the shared challenges and opportunities across the continent.

### **Theme 2: Women's Participation in Governance and Development**

Chapter 7 presents Alison Zuva and Paul Mushonga's notion of achieving SDG 5 in the Fourth Industrial Revolution through women's participation in politics and economic change in

Africa. Both argue that the Fourth Industrial Revolution allows Africa to redefine and expand the landscape of women's inclusion, empowerment, and participation in politics and the economic sphere.

Chapter 8 explores Zainab Olaitan's submission to the African Union and the Development of a Continental Gender Quota in Africa. She states that gender quotas have proven to be useful in correcting the unequal gender participation in politics while ensuring the increased presence of women in politics. And even though most African countries have gender quotas in whatever form, some countries do not see a need for such commitment, which calls for an intervention. Hence, the chapter presents facts on how the African Union can weaponise gender quotas to ensure increased participation of women in African politics. She argues that it is not enough for countries to pledge that they will ensure increased participation of women in politics; the AU needs to take the front line in implementing practical instruments to achieve this aspiration.

Chapter 9 presents Lesego Louisah Mosweu and Tinuade Adekunbi Ojo's opinion on "African women's land rights struggle in traditional societies". The chapter explores how traditions have directly and indirectly excluded women from acquiring, owning, and transferring land. The findings stipulate that tradition impedes women's access to land. An example of a harmful traditional practice is the male primogeniture rule, which exacerbates women's exclusion in society by marginalising women during land transfers.

Chapter 10 highlights Laureen Lifongo's "Enhancing Women's Participation in Democratic Governance in Sierra Leone" and examines the state of women's participation in democratic governance in Sierra Leone. To do so, the article explores explicitly the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act of 2022, which seeks to integrate women in decision-making, an important element in line with the UN SDG No. 5, aimed at achieving gender equality by 2030. For this reason, it ponders whether the procedural implications of the 2022 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Act will have a concrete impact on women's participation in democratic governance and future elections in the country. Using an explanatory, qualitative method and secondary data revealed that Sierra Leonean women's political participation in democratic governance continues to be affected by deep systemic socio-economic and political factors, despite their involvement in electoral processes.

Chapter 11, presents Beauty Shiviti's research on the underexplored role of women leaders in promoting accountability and combatting corruption within local governance, focusing on the Ekurhuleni Municipality - one of Gauteng's most corruption-affected areas. Despite progress in women's political representation, their impact on governance remains unclear. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 20 stakeholders, the study evaluates how women's leadership has influenced transparency and ethical practices since 2021. It offers critical insights and policy recommendations to strengthen accountability mechanisms, contributing to broader debates on gender and governance in South Africa.

### **Theme 3: Political Party Dynamics**

Chapter 12 addresses Vusi Gumbi's theme on "Gender and Age Demographics: The Qualitative Decline of the ANC." According to him, women in the ANC have not been viewed as intellectuals, theorists or nationalists despite having shaped the movement's history. They have continuously been reduced to figureheads such as 'Mother of the Nation' or 'Mother of the Liberation Struggle'. The chapter argues that while the decline of the party can be attributed to two things, the atrophied state of the party, and specifically its patriarchy and ageism, has been a contributing factor. Patriarchy and ageism have made it impossible for the ANC to be a vibrant institution through which there is an emergence of a leadership that is intellectually astute, morally above reproach and professionally grounded, with a thorough grasp of governance.

#### **Theme 4: Political Leadership Response on Gender and Social Policy**

Chapter 13 analyses Cecy Balogun and Omosefe Oyekanmi's view on the "Gender Dimensions of COVID-19 and Social Policy in sub-Saharan Africa". Their chapter examines the gender dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the social policy measures put in place to mitigate the impact of the disease in selected countries (Burkina Faso, Malawi, Uganda and Ethiopia) in sub-Saharan Africa. The chapter reveals that as a governance strategy, women's access to social policy interventions to mitigate the shocks of the pandemic was minimal compared to men. Given that women are more exposed to the vagaries of the disease, they recommend that governments in the SSA should upscale women's access to social benefits to ensure their lives and livelihoods are protected from the impact of the pandemic.

Chapter 14 by TA Ojo and Omosefe Oyekanmi focuses on further academic interest in African women in governance and the overall conclusions of the book. It is a reflective synthesis of the key insights and themes explored throughout the chapters. It highlights the progress, challenges, and future directions for women's participation in governance across Africa, emphasising the transformative impact of their leadership and the policies that have facilitated or hindered their rise to power.

#### **Methodology**

The methodology for the book *African Women in Governance: Policies and Stakeholders' Participation* employs a qualitative and quantitative research approach integrating primary and secondary data sources. This dual-method strategy is essential for exploring the complex and nuanced themes of women's roles in governance across Africa, capturing empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives. The research is structured around four thematic focuses: Women and Political Representation (Chapters 1-6); Women's Participation in Governance and Development (Chapters 7-10); Political Party Dynamics (Chapter 11); and Gender and Social Policy (Chapters 12 and 13). Each

thematic focus is investigated using methods tailored to its specific objectives while maintaining coherence across the book.

### **Primary Data Collection**

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders, including female political leaders, policymakers, civil society actors, and grassroots community representatives. These methods allow an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences, challenges, and perspectives. For instance, interviews with women legislators and activists are central to Chapter 4, providing firsthand insights into barriers to political representation. Similarly, focus group discussions with women's organisations enrich the chapter by elucidating the dynamics of governance and development from diverse viewpoints.

### **Secondary Data Collection**

Secondary data was gathered through a comprehensive review of existing literature, including academic articles, policy documents, and reports from international organisations, NGOs, and African Union institutions. This approach ensures a robust theoretical and contextual foundation for the research. For Chapters 1 to 6, and 13, secondary data was utilised to analyse trends in women's political representation across African countries. In Chapters 7 to 10, policy documents and development reports provided context for understanding women's contributions to governance and development initiatives.

In Chapter 11, the analysis of party manifestos and historical records complemented primary data, offering insights into the evolution of political party dynamics. Chapter 12 incorporated secondary sources to evaluate the effectiveness of existing gender and social policies, linking them to broader development goals using charts and tables.



## Justification of Methodology

The qualitative approach was particularly suited to the book's objectives because it emphasises depth and contextual understanding, aligning with the need to explore complex socio-political phenomena. The use of primary data ensured the inclusion of marginalised voices often absent in secondary sources, thereby addressing gaps in existing literature. Conversely, secondary data provided the necessary historical and comparative perspectives, allowing the chapter to situate contemporary issues within broader socio-political and policy frameworks.

This integrated methodology is consistent with established research practices in governance and gender studies (Creswell, 2014;), ensuring credibility and richness of data. By triangulating primary and secondary sources, the research achieves methodological rigour, fostering a comprehensive analysis of African women's roles in governance.

The methodology adopted was qualitative research, and primary and secondary data was presented. to narrate the book to further present the several significant themes and African states' efforts to address the political and economic factors influencing budget allocation to women-oriented programmes and projects in African communities. Contributions to the book adopt a gender policy-centric approach to each contributed theme.

## References

- African Union. (2013). *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want — Overview*. African Union. [Online]. Available at: <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview> [Accessed: 12 September 2025].
- Agbalajobi, D. T. (2010). Women's participation and the political process in Nigeria: Problems and prospects. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 4(2), 75–82

- Brookings. (2023). *African women and girls leading a continent*. Brookings Institution, 8 March 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/african-women-and-girls-leading-a-continent/>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- International IDEA. (2021). *Women's Political Participation: Africa Barometer 2021*. Stockholm: International IDEA. <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2021.21>
- International Monetary Fund. (2023). *Digitalization and gender equality in political leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa* (IMF Working Paper No. 2023/122). IMF. [Online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5089/9798400245039.001>
- Morojele, N. (2024). Women's representation in African parliaments: Progress and persistent gaps. *Societies*, 14(1), 23. MDPI. Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2075-4698/12/1/23>
- Sadie, Y. (2015). African women in political decision-making – “A voice that still remains a whisper”. In: Echle, C. & Sarmah, M. (eds.) *Women, policy and political leadership*, pp: 65–75. Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Ltd.
- Simbine, A. T. & Oyekanmi, O. (2025). Contemporary trends in African elections (2013–2023). *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies*, 7(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.51415/ajims.v7i1.1635>
- UN Women. (2025). *South Africa B-30 Report*. UN Women. January 2025. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/south\\_africa\\_b30\\_report\\_en.pdf?utm\\_source](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-01/south_africa_b30_report_en.pdf?utm_source)
- UN Women. (n.d.). *Women's leadership and political participation in Africa*. UN Women Africa. [Online]. Available at: <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/womens-leadership>



# Chapter One

## *An Overview of African Women in Governance: Policies and Stakeholders' Participation*

**Tinuade Adekunbi Ojo** 

*Centre for Race, Gender and Class,  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa*

### **Introduction**

The advancement of women's representation in governance decision-making remains an evolving challenge, despite decades of international advocacy and the establishment of various gender equity policies. While African women have gained greater opportunities to participate in governance at local, national, and regional levels, their representation remains disproportionately low compared to men, with full parity achieved in only a few contexts (Cousins & Wiggins, 2022; Zulu, 2023). Although African governments have increasingly acknowledged the value of women's participation, the translation of commitments into practice has faced significant impediments. These include deeply entrenched cultural norms, socio-economic barriers such as poverty and limited access to education, experiences of violence and marginalisation, and structural limitations within governance systems themselves (Archer et al., 2021; Nzeadibe, 2020).

Amid these systemic challenges, African women leaders continue to make notable strides, thereby generating positive momentum for gender inclusion. Prominent examples include figures such as Cissé Mariam Kaïdama Sidibé of Mali and Gertrude Mongella of Tanzania, alongside women occupying

significant roles across countries like Burkina Faso, Tanzania, and South Africa (Emejulu & Puwar, 2019; Chipunza et al., 2021). However, this progress remains uneven. While some nations demonstrate improvements in participatory governance, others exhibit stagnation or regression (Murray & Sinclair, 2022). Scholars stress that although governments frequently endorse gender-inclusive policies, implementation often remains rhetorical rather than substantive (Smith & Chappell, 2022).

Historically, African women's exclusion from governance has been shaped by structural discrimination embedded within family, educational, and cultural systems, as well as by colonial and post-colonial legal frameworks that entrenched patriarchal authority (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2021; Singha & Singha, 2024). Pre-colonial systems, organised around kinship hierarchies and the control of women's labour and reproduction, positioned women at the lowest rung of power structures (Dery et al., 2022). Colonial administrations reinforced this marginalisation by consolidating male elites as intermediaries of state power (Eferebo, 2024). Post-independence political regimes similarly relegated women to subordinate roles, often reducing their political legitimacy to symbolic tropes such as the "Mother of the Nation," which simultaneously celebrated and constrained women's political agency (Tarkhanova, 2021; Krige, 2025).

Despite these historical constraints, African women have consistently resisted exclusion and mobilised for change. Since the 1975 Mexico Women's Conference, states in Eastern and Southern Africa established gender mechanisms aimed at accelerating equality, often under pressure from international advocacy and United Nations lobbying (Meintjes, 2010; Donert, 2023). These initiatives, although often top-down and state-centric, created new institutional pathways for women's advancement in governance. From the 1990s onward, the influence of global women's movements, coupled with the rise of local women's organisations, led to significant policy innovations across the continent, including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the African Union's adoption of comprehensive gender frameworks (AU, 2021; UN Women, 2024; Lwamba et al., 2022).

The evolution of African women's political participation emphasises the importance of local activism and international engagement. Women's organisations, often supported by international funders, have been crucial in mobilising for reforms, strengthening advocacy, and holding governments accountable (Hessini, 2020; Chikwe et al., 2024). Partnerships between local movements and international donors have sustained progress, even in contexts where state-driven reforms were fragile or inconsistent (Eyben, 2015; Basu, 2016).

Nevertheless, the intersection of women's inclusion and broader stakeholder participation remains insufficiently explored within governance discourses. Frameworks such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and Transitional Results Matrices (TRMs) highlight attempts at participatory governance, yet women's voices often remain marginal within these processes (Chandi et al., 2022). This gap signals the need for more robust approaches that view women not merely as a marginalised group but as central actors in governance, socio-economic development, and democratic transformation (Banerjee & Tamale, 2020).

This chapter therefore investigates the post-colonial evolution of democracy and governance in Africa with a focus on the role of women and the policies designed to enhance their participation. By situating women's political agency within shifting political and electoral landscapes, the analysis engages with historical legacies and contemporary challenges. It also explores the interplay of local activism, international frameworks, and institutional reform in shaping gendered pathways to governance. Ultimately, the persistent gap between policy rhetoric and practical implementation highlights the unfinished project of women's empowerment in Africa, while ongoing resistance and innovation by women leaders and organisations provide critical momentum towards a more inclusive governance future (Olufemi & Delaney, 2023; Onyango et al., 2021).

## **Women, Governance and Historical Trajectories in Africa**

The role of women in governance has seldom been prioritised in African states compared to other global democracies, despite the existence of participatory governance mechanisms articulated in continental charters and protocols (Africa Barometer, 2024). Analyses of women's political participation often highlight the colonial and postcolonial eras, with comparatively limited attention to women's roles in pre-colonial governance systems. Yet pre-colonial Africa was characterised by complex and diverse political structures in which women exercised varying degrees of power and influence. While chiefly systems often emphasised male authority, kinship-based political and social structures frequently created parallel spaces where women held significant authority, particularly in matters of resource allocation, dispute resolution, and communal decision-making (Donner & Goddard, 2023; Hillman & Radel, 2023). This illustrates that women's exclusion was neither universal nor absolute in pre-colonial Africa, but rather shaped by context-specific cultural, economic, and political dynamics (Nwakanma, 2022).

Colonialism fundamentally disrupted these indigenous systems, imposing new legal and political frameworks that displaced or weakened existing gendered power relations (Akyeampong & Fofack, 2014). Women, who had historically participated in political and economic governance, were increasingly relegated to subordinate roles as colonial administrations consolidated authority through male elites such as chiefs and headmen (Eferebo, 2024). Despite this marginalisation, women actively resisted colonial authority and sought to renegotiate their agency, sometimes carving out new forms of influence within these constraints (Adjepong, 2015; Bouka, 2020). Nevertheless, the overall impact of colonial rule was a significant erosion of women's rights and stature (Ewelukwa, 2002).

The transition to independence offered opportunities for political restructuring, but gender issues were largely overlooked in negotiations, despite women's central role in

nationalist movements (Kajta, 2022). Postcolonial governance structures often mirrored the patriarchal values of colonial administrations, entrenching systemic barriers to women's political participation (Sharp, 2022). This continuity emphasises the challenge of embedding women's voices into the governance frameworks of independent African states (Meintjes, 2010).

A historical lens further reveals how concepts of citizenship shaped women's political exclusion. From pre-colonial through colonial, apartheid, and post-independence contexts, African women have faced an enduring struggle to reclaim their rights as equal citizens. Their marginalisation from public and political life created a "historical deficit" that continues to shape contemporary governance structures. Yet women have consistently played key roles in liberation struggles and post-conflict reconstruction, particularly across sub-Saharan Africa – a region that has experienced approximately 70% of the world's civil wars (Chivangurai, 2022; Smith, 2023). Despite their contributions, women remain underrepresented in peace negotiations and post-conflict governance arrangements, undermining gender equity and sustainable political settlements (Hassim, 2022).

The barriers to women's political participation in contemporary Africa are multifaceted, encompassing entrenched cultural norms, institutional exclusion, and socioeconomic obstacles. Limited access to financial resources, for instance, restricts women's capacity to contest elections, develop political platforms, or implement gender-responsive policies (Mikell, 2023; Banda, 2021). These structural and financial constraints perpetuate women's underrepresentation and highlight the urgent need for reforms that extend beyond policy rhetoric to create enabling environments for gender parity in governance.

## **Pre-Colonial Africa**

Africa is a continent rich in civilisation with a profound historical narrative. Current discussions often revolve around the controversial topic of Africa's pre-colonial history, cultural achievements, and societal complexities. Scholars

and commentators should exercise caution in their discourse, avoiding sweeping generalisations that overlook the continent's diverse experiences (Dunne, 2024). As with any region, common threads link many African societies. Notably, the reliance on natural resources forms the cornerstone of their livelihoods, cultural practices, and social constructs (Sibanda, 2024). Furthermore, there exists a tapestry of shared norms and values, such as kinship and family dynamics, prevalent religious beliefs, frameworks for political governance, collective memories, oral traditions, and linguistic ties, which intricately weave together the identities of African people (Chanda, 2023).

Pre-colonial Africa consisted of extensive societies, kingdoms, and states that pursued various internal and external motivations for expansion (Green, 2016). The primary socio-political structures were predominantly governed by chiefly systems, yet kinship structures significantly influenced societal organisation, economic activities, social relations, and political engagement (Walters, 2021). Alongside the prevalent chiefly system, there existed a variety of political frameworks. The presence of large societies or states characterised by intricate political hierarchies and institutions does not imply that women were systematically excluded from political power (Nwakanma, 2022). Africa's pre-colonial history illustrates a rich diversity in the social roles and status of women, highlighting their complex positions within these societies.

Women have historically played active roles in the political governance of society. The structures of political governance and the legal systems in place were not solely the domain of men, as they encompassed a wider spectrum of participation (Galappaththi et al., 2022). Typically, societies operated with parallel political systems, one rooted in kinship and family dynamics. Through these kinship-based systems, women were often directly engaged in political governance, extending their influence beyond the traditional confines of household and family responsibilities (Donner & Goddard, 2023). In addition to their political involvement, women have significantly contributed to the economic activities of society. The existence of parallel political systems ensured that women



not only participated in these economic endeavours but also had a voice in the governance of such activities (Hillman & Radel, 2023). This dual engagement in economic and political spheres highlights the importance of recognising women's roles in shaping societal structures and decision-making processes.

## **Colonial Legacies**

The impact of colonisation on African societies was profound and traumatic. The process devastated rural and urban life, disrupting every aspect of societal organisation (Gouni & Verny, 2023). Amongst these aspects, the governance structures were perhaps the most affected by colonial rule. Before colonisation, many African societies thrived under systems characterised by participatory democracy, localism, and inclusiveness. Decision-making involved a wide range of community members, including elders, women, youth, and various social groups (Newman, 2023). This participatory approach was evident across diverse civilisations such as the Sahelian, Bantu, and Nilotic cultures. Even in established kingdoms and empires like the Malinkes, Mandinkes, Wolofs, and Ashantis, authority was wielded within well-defined laws and traditions, reflecting a deeply rooted sense of accountability.

In pre-colonial African societies, leadership was intrinsically linked to community responsibility and accountability (Igboin, 2016). Rulers were not absolute monarchs; rather, they adhered to established customs and could be challenged by their subjects through mechanisms such as people's courts, where disputes were settled publicly (Pennington, 2023). This system of governance fostered a culture of transparency and communal involvement, where opposition to leadership could be voiced and addressed. The presence of social checks and balances allowed for a more inclusive political framework, highlighting the importance of collective decision-making in maintaining societal cohesion (Gluckman et al., 2023).

Colonialism fundamentally disrupted traditional governance structures across Africa. Focused predominantly on

resource extraction, capitalist expansion, and military authority, colonisers effectively dismantled indigenous governance systems (Hope, 2025). The implementation of divide-and-rule strategies led to significant fractures within African societies, notably diminishing the roles and status of women and youth (Oyugi, 2024). The essence of inclusivity that once characterised African governance was obliterated, leaving a legacy of exclusion and disruption. While post-colonial efforts aimed to restore traditional governance structures, these were often co-opted by neo-colonial leaders to further their own interests, sidelining genuine inclusivity (Maqashalala, 2025). In this context, the replacement of societal inclusiveness with elite dominance severely impacted governance, exacerbating inequalities and limiting participation. Post-colonial frameworks mirrored colonial precedents, once again marginalising women's roles in decision-making processes (Joseph, 2025). As African women faced the dual challenges of colonial legacies and oppressive postcolonial regimes, they mobilised collectively, organising and advocating for their rights on various fronts (Parashar & Schulz, 2021). Their resistance efforts highlighted the urgent need for reforms that promote equitable governance, showcasing their resilience and commitment to fostering inclusivity in Africa's political landscape.

Taken together, the historical and contemporary trajectories of women's engagement in governance emphasise resilience and exclusion. From pre-colonial kinship-based authority to colonial displacement, from nationalist mobilisation to postcolonial marginalisation, African women have navigated shifting political landscapes marked by opportunities and constraints. Understanding this history is critical to addressing present-day inequities and designing governance systems that integrate women not as marginal participants, but as central actors in shaping Africa's political and socio-economic futures.

### **Women Leadership and Governance**

Women's leadership is a vital driver of empowerment across Africa, not only for women but also for broader marginalised groups in society. Governance, increasingly understood as a

public instrument of empowerment, provides African women with a legitimate claim to participation given their central role in the continent's social fabric. However, external forces and colonial legacies have historically undermined African women's governance identities, erasing their political and historical contributions (Meintjes, 2010). Despite these challenges, women's involvement in governance spans traditional, political, religious, economic, and educational domains, reflecting a deep-seated history of engagement and influence (Chaminuka et al., 2015).

Prominent African women leaders have demonstrated that empowerment in governance extends beyond formal political structures. Figures such as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Jeanette Kagame, and Evangeline Barongo illustrate how leadership at the grassroots and community levels can evolve into national and even continental significance (Chaminuka et al., 2015). Their trajectories affirm that women's leadership contributes to mobilising marginalised groups, strengthening democratic institutions, and advancing inclusive development. Nevertheless, women remain significantly underrepresented in political decision-making, which constrains the inclusivity and responsiveness of governance structures across Africa.

The continued underrepresentation of women in governance emphasises structural and systemic barriers. These challenges include entrenched patriarchal norms, limited financial resources, and the adoption of Western democratic systems that inadvertently reinforced gender marginalisation (Meintjes, 2010). Yet, examples from countries such as Rwanda and Uganda demonstrate that affirmative action policies, such as gender quotas and reserved seats, can improve women's political participation. Still, in many African states, women's representation at local and national levels remains far below global averages, limiting their ability to shape policies and drive equitable social transformation (Smith, 2022).

To address these disparities, scholars emphasise the need for holistic strategies that combine institutional reforms with initiatives that enhance individual women's leadership

capacities. Mentorship, networking, and education programmes are critical in dismantling cultural barriers and enabling sustainable political participation (Miller et al., 2022; Karam, 2021). By learning from the experiences of influential women leaders and adopting targeted interventions, African nations can move towards governance systems that better reflect gender equity and social inclusion. Ultimately, the empowerment of women in governance is not only a matter of justice but also a prerequisite for building resilient, democratic, and inclusive societies.

### **Current Landscape of Good in Governance**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has heralded considerable transformation in Africa, with the region emerging as one of the fastest-developing areas worldwide. A key outcome of this progression is the trend towards increased democratisation at the local level, despite the continent remaining the least democratic globally (Meintjes, 2010). Elections for political, economic, service, and development organisations have proliferated, yet gender governance remains a secondary consideration during these formative processes.

Citizen participation has emerged as an important element of effective governance, yet the representation of diverse demographic groups frequently exhibits considerable disparities. A critical examination of women's involvement in governance reveals a stark contrast between their significant presence in the population and their representation in political frameworks. Specifically, an estimated 30% to 40% of the population in numerous African villages and towns comprises women, yet they constitute merely about 1% to 3% of individuals eligible to run for electoral positions. Furthermore, studies reveal that women hold only 10% to 15% of seats in national legislatures across the continent, emphasising a pronounced gap between the proportion of women in the population and their actual participation in governance (Rowlands, 2021; UN Women, 2020). This disparity not only questions the inclusivity of governance processes in Africa but also highlights systemic barriers that undermine women's political representation.

The lack of female representation in governance initiatives raises critical questions about the effectiveness and legitimacy of political systems in Africa. Women play a vital role in community development and decision-making processes; consequently, their underrepresentation hampers the comprehensive reflection of societal needs and aspirations in governance. Previous research indicates that when women are included in governance, there tends to be a positive impact on policy decisions related to health, education, and social welfare (Kamau, 2022). Therefore, the absence of significant female representation not only perpetuates inequality but also detracts from the overall effectiveness of governance, emphasising the necessity for reforms aimed at enhancing women's participation in public affairs (International IDEA, 2021). In summary, the marginalisation of women in African governance structures illustrates significant flaws in democratic representation and calls for urgent attention to strategies that foster inclusivity. To address these inequities, it is essential to implement policies that empower women politically and socially, fostering environments conducive to their active participation. Engaging women as key stakeholders in governance not only promotes equity but also positions societies to benefit from diverse perspectives and experiences that can contribute to more sustainable and effective governance outcomes (Tinker, 2020). Therefore, policymakers must prioritise the elimination of barriers that hinder women's participation, promoting gender equity as a foundational principle of democratic governance in Africa.

The dimensions of good governance that are most advantageous for women – namely representation, participation, and democratisation – have historically constituted significant barriers to their engagement in civic and political life. The Pan-African movement, which emerged over a century ago, established these principles as critical for fostering political, economic, and social transformations within the continent. This movement has played an essential role in advocating for the rights of marginalised groups, particularly women, although the trajectory of governance in Africa has

fluctuated because of various factors, including the intensity of Pan-African initiatives and the effectiveness of subsequent leadership. Research suggests that while strides have been made towards inclusive governance, challenges still persist, limiting the realisation of these principles for women (Bamgbose, 2021; Otieno, 2022). The governance record of Africa has, at times, demonstrated progress and, at other times, retrenchment, driven by the depth of Pan-African advocacy and the calibre of leadership that has emerged. Influential leaders like Lee Kuan Yew have emphasised that good governance is fundamental to attracting investment and fostering economic development, thereby identifying it as essential for the sustainability and development of African nations (Kpundeh, 2020). The argument positions governance not merely as a political concern but as a vital element in economic strategy, particularly in the context of increasing globalisation and competition for investment. Challenges to governance quality, such as corruption and lack of accountability, continue to hinder economic growth across the continent (Mbeki, 2021). In the face of these persistent challenges, women have demonstrated resilience through their continuous involvement in political processes, education, and advocacy for equality. Despite encountering formidable obstacles, including socio-cultural barriers and systemic discrimination, women have sought to secure their roles in governance, striving to influence decision-making at various levels (Agbalajobi, 2022; Tchamyau, 2021). Their active engagement is crucial, not only for achieving gender equality but also for enhancing the overall governance framework in Africa. Consequently, recognising and supporting women's agency in governance is essential for fostering democratic principles and addressing socio-economic disparities on the continent.

### **Representation in Parliaments and Cabinets**

Women's representation has become a symbol of modernity, democracy, and good governance (Mechkova et al., 2024). While instances of women's representation in governance are limited worldwide, sub-Saharan Africa exhibits particularly egregious disparities (Akinwale, 2023). Within this continent,

independent and sovereign nations frequently see a dearth of women leaders in parliaments, cabinets, and political parties. Despite various initiatives and an enduring struggle, women remain under-represented and marginalised in national and regional decision-making institutions and processes (Nsana, 2024). This chapter analyses women's representation in African parliaments and cabinets, drawing from the findings of the 2021 African Women Barometer Survey, which assessed awareness of the AU Gender Policy in twelve countries. The survey included a total of 9,897 participants, comprising 6,526 women (66%) and 3,371 men (34%) (IDEA, 2021). The outcome indicates that as of 2021, women hold positions as Heads of State or Government in only 21 countries worldwide, while 119 countries have never had a woman in such leadership roles. At the present pace, achieving gender parity in the highest decision-making positions is projected to take approximately 130 years. Globally, women constitute just 21% of government ministers, and only 14 countries have reached gender parity by appointing 50% or more women to cabinet positions. Given the current rate of progress, less than a one-percentage-point increase annually, gender parity in ministerial appointments is unlikely to be realised before 2077. Since independence, Women in Politics Worldwide (WIPW) initiatives have fostered a continental context advocating for African women's representation and notably emphasise the importance of policy frameworks (Chiluwa, 2025). Women's advancement has been a significant issue on the global agenda since the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), focusing on bolstering their representation in governance institutions (Gouws & Madsen, 2021). The 1995 Fourth World Conference adopted the BPFA, emphasising the need for national-plus reviews to expedite women's policy and decision-making enhancement (Bunsell & Daniel, 2024).

The African Union Gender Policy adopted in 2004 set a target for achieving gender equality in governance, institutions, and decision-making processes by 2010 (Kalumba et al., 2024). In line with these frameworks, constitutions advocating representative democracy highlight the necessity for free civic participation and equitable representation within local and

national parliaments (Samajdar, 2023). Yet, despite these efforts, women account for only 1,000 out of 6,550, or 15.25%, of parliamentarians in African national decision-making bodies, with eleven countries reporting figures below 10% (Kaputu, 2024). Moreover, following the 2021 elections, only 52 out of 779, or 6.68%, of ministers are women (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021).

### **Barriers to Entry and Advancement**

Despite increased awareness and advocacy for equity in governance structures over the past decade, significant challenges persist regarding women's entry and advancement in decision-making positions within formal and informal governance systems (Chanda & Ngulube, 2024). These challenges stem from deeply entrenched social norms that are widely perpetuated, as well as limiting structures and processes inherent in political parties (Lwamba et al., 2022). Additionally, the absence of education and pervasive poverty emerge as recurrent themes across various countries, often cited as substantial barriers to women's participation in governance structures, whether in rural or urban settings (Omweri, 2024). These obstacles are further compounded by patriarchal systems, inadequate support from male counterparts and families, aspirations for financial independence, and the extra burdens of care and domestic responsibilities that many women face (Sengar & Shah, 2024). The influence of culture is starkly evident in many of the countries studied, where traditional practices significantly limit women's participation in or access to governance structures (Omweri, 2024). These cultural norms often create an environment that discourages women's involvement in decision-making processes, reinforcing the existing disparities (Omweri, 2024). Efforts to address these issues must not only focus on elevating women's positions within political frameworks but also challenge the broader societal narratives that inhibit their participation. Ultimately, achieving gender equity in governance requires a comprehensive understanding of the various intersecting factors contributing to women's marginalisation in political spaces (Kelly, 2019).



## **Key Findings and Insights**

The promotion of women's political participation is situated within theoretical frameworks that emphasise structural opportunities and women's capacity to translate resources into decision-making power. International institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) have played a central role in formalising commitments to gender equality through initiatives including the AU Gender Policy, the AU Parity Principle, Agenda 2063, and the UN Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2021; African Union, 2015, 2016). These frameworks aim not only to increase women's representation in political institutions but also to ensure their substantive participation in shaping policy agendas. Despite these commitments, however, the enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and gender equity policies remains inconsistent across many countries, undermining the transformative potential of these initiatives (Boon & Khibini, 2022).

At the regional and national levels, complementary frameworks have been introduced to reinforce women's empowerment and political engagement. Regional bodies such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have established gender policies, while African states have institutionalised gender governance through ministries for women, gender commissions, and gender desks (UN, 2020; Awumbila et al., 2020). Some countries, such as Uganda, have also adopted affirmative action measures, including reserved parliamentary seats for women, to advance representation (Tripp, 2023). Yet, the effectiveness of these structures remains contested. Mechanisms such as South Africa's Office on the Status of Women have raised visibility for gender issues, but they often risk marginalising them as "special concerns" rather than integrating them into mainstream governance (Sung & Hock, 2019). Furthermore, reliance on male political champions can depoliticise women's issues, limiting grassroots influence and undermining the autonomy of women's advocacy (Acker, 2023; Sawyer, 2022).

Despite notable progress in women's representation over the past two decades, African women continue to face significant barriers to political participation. Poverty, illiteracy, and entrenched socio-cultural norms remain powerful obstacles that restrict women's involvement in governance and decision-making (Meintjes, 2010). In many contexts, women are still perceived as subordinate to men, with roles confined to domestic responsibilities, which undermine their authority even when elected or appointed to office. Efforts to challenge these norms often expose women to ridicule or accusations of cultural rebellion, creating reluctance to participate in governance. Moreover, the under-utilisation of existing gender policies and weak institutional implementation perpetuate the gap between policy formulation and practice. Thus, while international, regional, and national frameworks provide structural avenues for women's engagement, the persistence of socio-cultural prejudice and institutional neglect continues to constrain meaningful gender-inclusive governance across the continent.

### **Regional Differences in Women's Governance Participation**

Patterns of women's participation in governance differ across Africa, with the continent divided into four regions: North Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, and West Africa. Countries within these regions share similar socio-economic and demographic characteristics because of their common histories and cultural heritages.

Southern Africa leads the continent in women's political participation and representation (Meintjes, 2010). The region has the highest number of women government ministers, including deputy ministers and ministers of state, and the highest rates of women in parliament and on local councils, where women comprise a majority in some areas. East African countries are further behind Southern Africa but ahead of other regions regarding women's participation in governance. Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda have policies that strongly encourage women's decision-making in local governance, and Kenya and

Uganda have introduced legislation to increase the number of elected women at the local level. The West African region exhibits relatively low levels of women's participation (IDRC, 2010). The region has the lowest number of women government ministers, including deputy ministers and ministers of state, and the lowest rates of women in parliament and on local councils. In North Africa, women's participation in governance varies greatly across countries, ranging from strong legislative involvement in Algeria to the absence of women in executive-level government positions in Tunisia and Libya. Because of the imbalance in the representation of women between the four regions, it is hard to speak of women's governance in Africa in a general sense.

### **East Africa**

East Africa has a multiplicity of social, cultural, regional and economic groups characterised by diversities in language, religion and cultural practices. This makes governance particularly problematic in these countries (Meintjes, 2010). For example, inequalities contribute to high rates of female poverty in Uganda, which, with the other factors operating against them, make for considerable challenges for women wanting to enter the political sphere. In the six countries of East Africa, women's participation in politics at the lower levels is estimated to be above 20%. However, in the middle and senior cadre of the political leadership ladder, it is much lower. More women have been appointed to political leadership positions than those who have been directly elected to such positions (Chaminuka et al., 2015).

### **West Africa**

West Africa offers perhaps the most hopeful regional example for women's participation in governance. Nigeria is the region's largest economy, with relatively mature democratic institutions, and remains the most powerful actor in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) community of fifteen states. Nevertheless, Nigeria's female population

registers amongst the world's lowest rates of voter turnout and participation, with women accounting for only around a quarter of registered voters. In part, this develops from socio-cultural norms that shape women's political engagement behaviour (Kelly, 2019). The last three elections, in 2015, 2019 and 2023, have featured a female presidential candidate, and Nigeria's President appointed the first female finance minister in 2021, but a woman has yet to secure a seat in the Senate.

### **Southern Africa**

The engagement of women in political and governance spheres in Southern Africa has become increasingly prominent compared to other sub-regions within the continent. Following the transition from colonial rule, founding leaders such as Eritrea's Isaias Afewerki, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, and South Africa's Nelson Mandela recognised the importance of fostering female representation and governance structures. These leaders aimed to build a formidable constituency base, which would subsequently enhance national outreach and ensure credible follow-up on political initiatives (SADC, 2021). Furthermore, Malawi's Bingu wa Mutharika exemplified support for the multiparty process and promoted female political engagement, while Botswana's governmental restructuring facilitated the creation of a youth-led coalition. This coalition, established in 1999 and officially launched in 2003, garnered robust political backing from women leaders across the sub-region (Matlosa & Smit, 2017). The emergence of numerous women's associations within Southern Africa highlights a growing commitment to participatory governance. For instance, the International SADC Parliamentary Forum, which includes a significant female coalition from the SADC national legislatures, exemplifies the dedication to active governance by women (SADC Parliamentary Forum, 2020). The women involved in these governance structures increasingly perceive their contributions not merely as a quest for gender equality, but rather as essential to driving development and societal transformation within their respective nations and across the sub-region (Ramatswi, 2025). This paradigm shift reflects an enhanced recognition of women's

agency in governance processes and their roles as catalysts for substantive change. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat has produced guidelines aimed at promoting gender equity amongst member countries, highlighting the necessity of strong political will (SADC, 2021). This initiative is further bolstered by the proliferation of civil society organisations across many Southern African nations, which serve as a vital foundation for consolidating democratic governance and promoting women's active involvement in politics (Matlosa & Smit, 2017). The combined efforts of governmental policy and civil society activism reflect a significant movement towards greater female representation in political arenas, thereby fostering an environment conducive to sustained democratic engagement and social progress.

## **North Africa**

Participation of women in governance in the North Africa region currently ranks amongst the lowest on the continent (Meintjes, 2010). This observation is consistent with the region's cultural and religious systems, which generally provide a limited role for women in society. For instance, participation in national parliaments follows a south-to-north decline across the continent: 23.5% in sub-Saharan Africa, 15.7% in North Africa, 15.4% in East Africa, and 11.9% in West Africa. Similarly, female ministers represent 19.6% of sub-Saharan cabinets, compared to 6.6% for North African countries. Regional differences also distinguish areas of participation, with Northern Africa registering the lowest levels of gender budgeting or auditing. A strong interplay exists amongst religion, culture, and political regimes in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, influencing the performance of most Arab countries on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) (IDRC, 2010). Cultural attitudes strongly favour men as better political leaders (measuring 5.0 on a scale from 1 to 6) and prioritise men's right to jobs over women's (measuring 5.2), reflecting the region's persistence of strong religious and cultural conservatism.

## Policy Recommendations

Recommendations to strengthen women's participation in governance emphasise key enablers and barriers. Governments, development organisations, and civil society hold critical responsibilities in expanding sustained ICT (information and communications technology) use by female parliamentarians to enhance usefulness, usability, and transformative innovation. Targeted support in policymaking, proposal preparation, and stakeholder dialogue should be reinforced by multi-stakeholder partnerships and cross-border collaboration. Delivering programmes at a woman's pace – with strong emphasis on accessibility, peer support, and trust – is essential to foster long-term engagement. Policy priorities must adopt inclusive, multidimensional, and intersectoral approaches to mainstreaming, incorporating poverty reduction, gender empowerment, education, entrepreneurship, innovation, and youth participation (Kelly, 2019).

A central challenge lies in ensuring that greater participation of women does not inadvertently result in the marginalisation of men, which may exacerbate social inequalities and provoke resistance that undermines public commitments to gender equality and development goals. Evidence highlights the need to conceptualise gender equality in governance as a dynamic system that empowers women and men. This approach mitigates male resistance, addresses women's fears of losing economic security, and fosters positive synergies that generate collective societal benefit. Advocacy should therefore emphasise inclusivity, shared responsibilities, and mutual empowerment (Chaminuka et al., 2015).

Persistent barriers, however, remain. These include sexist and patronage-based political cultures as well as entrenched gendered economic and household inequalities. Addressing these requirements involves quotas, empowerment programmes, electoral monitoring, and proactive enforcement of gender equality frameworks. Sustained commitment to these interventions is critical for building inclusive governance

structures that facilitate greater female participation across Africa (Kelly, 2019).

Policy recommendations for African member states should focus on enacting and monitoring the African Union Gender Policy. Laws, and policies must reflect the realities of women's representation, participation, and civic engagement while ensuring that women are not confined to limited or stereotypical roles. Clear stakeholder responsibilities and coordinated mechanisms for collaboration must be established. Stakeholders should be proactively engaged in dialogue to address capacity gaps, implementation challenges, and opportunities for policy innovation (Chaminuka et al., 2015).

Furthermore, research is needed to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of existing laws and policies in closing gender gaps in governance. Findings should be widely disseminated, with women actively involved in the cycle of research, monitoring, and advocacy, given that they are most directly affected by policy shortcomings. Capacity development initiatives must be designed to equip stakeholders, particularly women, with the skills required to monitor implementation and engage decision-makers effectively. Finally, political will must be cultivated at all levels of leadership to prioritise and accelerate the realisation of laws and policies that advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the policies and challenges that affect African women's full participation in governance. Despite numerous policies and commitments to increase women's participation in decision-making processes, progress has been slow or non-existent in many African countries. The absence of a political will to implement gender policies is a significant challenge. There is a need for a comprehensive review of the existing policies to identify gaps and ensure that women's participation in governance is prioritised.

Although many African leaders have recognised the importance of policies in addressing the challenges faced by

women, policies alone cannot bring about change. Therefore, there is a need for multi-stakeholder participation in women's policy advocacy at all levels. Women in national and local government decision-making positions should mentor and encourage women in community-based organisations to mobilise women at grassroots level to advocate for policy implementation. It is also crucial for African women to establish networks in and outside their countries to share experiences and provide mutual support in policy advocacy. Policy research is vital in generating information on the impact of policies on women's lives, which can be used to hold policymakers accountable.

African women activists played a key role in shaping the African platform for action, which led to the establishment of the African Union. Women's networks and alliances are essential in ensuring that the needs and concerns of women are integrated into national laws and policies. However, sisterhood and solidarity amongst women are often undermined by individual and organisational competition for limited resources. Networking and coalition-building require time, commitment, skill, and resources, but they can be effective in bringing about change.

## References

- Acker, J. (2023). Gendered organizations and the complexities of bureaucratic governance. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 30(2), 241–259.
- Adele Orisadare, M. (2019). *An Assessment of the Role of Women's Groups in Women's Political Participation and Economic Development in Nigeria*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2019.00052>
- Adeleke, O, J. (2014). Women's political participation at the local government level: A case study of Akoko Southwest Local Government area, Ondo State, Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal*, Special Edition 2014, 223–237. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/reader/236414085>



- Adewale, A. & Schepers, S. (2023). African pre-colonial social and political structures. In: Adewale, A. & Schepers, S. (eds.) *Reimagining Africa: Lifting the veil of ignorance*, pp: 67–90. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-40360-6\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-40360-6_4)
- Adjepong, A. (2015). The role of African women in the political development of pre-colonial Africa: a historical analysis. *Women in Development Essays in Memory of Prof. DO Akintunde*, 17–39.
- Africa Barometer (2024). *Women's Political Participation*. Africa Barometer. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2024-07/womens-political-participation-africa-barometer-2024.pdf>
- African Union (AU). (1999). *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*. African Union. [Online]. Available at: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36804-treaty-african\\_charter\\_on\\_rights\\_welfare\\_of\\_the\\_child.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36804-treaty-african_charter_on_rights_welfare_of_the_child.pdf)
- African Union (AU). (2004). *Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa*. [Online]. Available at: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38956-doc-assembly\\_au\\_decl\\_12\\_iii\\_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38956-doc-assembly_au_decl_12_iii_e.pdf)
- African Union. (2013). *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want — Overview*. African Union. [Online]. Available at: <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>
- African Union. (2016). *The African Union Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Policy*. Addis Ababa: African Union.
- African Union (AU). (2021). *Gender Equality and Development*. African Union. [Online]. Available at: <https://au.int/en/gender-equality-development>
- Agbalajobi, D. T. (2022). Women in politics: The Nigerian experience. *African Journal of Political Science*, 11(2), 45–60.
- Agbalajobi, D.T. (2010). Women's participation and the political process in Nigeria: Problems and prospects. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 4(2), 75–82.
- Ahlers, R., Van der Meer, L. & Karam, Z. (2023). Gender quotas and women's political participation: The global landscape. *Governance*, 36(2), 451–469.

- Akinwale, A. A. (2023). Gender equity and social progress: empowering women and girls to drive sustainable development in sub-Saharan Africa. *International Journal of Innovation Research and Advanced Studies*, 2(2). Available at: <https://harvardpublications.com/hijiras/article/view/66>
- Akyeampong, E. & Fofack, H. (2014). The contribution of African women to economic growth and development in the pre-colonial and colonial periods: historical perspectives and policy implications. *Economic History of Developing Regions*, 29(1), 42–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20780389.2014.923154>
- Albu, D. (2023). Report *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023* (UN Women, UN DESA, 2023). *Drepturile Omului*, 94.
- Archer, C., Muriithi, M. & Nzeadibe, T. C. (2021). Gender dynamics and governance in Africa: Challenges and opportunities. *African Journal of Political Science*, 16(4), 25–45.
- Asuelime, L. E. (2017). Civil society and the South African Developmental State: an appraisal. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 30(1), 45–65. Available at: <https://www.scopus.com/pages/publications/85070403299>
- Awumbila, M., Antwi, A. & Amonoo, N. (2020). Gender, governance, and development in Africa: Exploring the challenges and opportunities. *African Journal of Political Science*, 15(1), 23–41.
- Babtunde, D. O. (2021). Women and political power in Africa: Belonging and isolation. *Gender and Behaviour*, 19(3), 18366–18374.
- Bamgbose, O. (2021). The role of Pan-Africanism in women's political participation in Africa. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 12(1.1), 1–15.
- Banda, F. (2021). Gender and governance in African contexts: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of African Governance*, 9(4), 55–75.
- Banerjee, S. & Tamale, S. (2020). Women in leadership: The evolving landscape in Africa. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 22(3), 321–338.
- Basu, A. (2016). *Women's movements in the global era: The power of local feminisms*. Hachette UK.

## Chapter One

- Bett, K. H. & Ngala-Dimba, M. A. (2022). The appeals in women contestants' campaign slogans during the 2017 general elections in Kenya. *Heliyon*, 8(8):e10323. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e10323>
- Bond, E. J. (2019). Women's Legal Rights, In: *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.258>
- Boon, F. P. & Khibini, M. (2022). Gender and legal frameworks: Examining legislative gaps in women's rights. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 31(2), 130–145.
- Bouka, Y. (2020). Women, colonial resistance, and decolonization. In: Yacob-Haliso, O. & Falola, T. (eds.) *The Palgrave handbook of African women's studies*, pp: 1–19. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77030-7\\_5-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77030-7_5-1)
- Bunsell, P. & Daniel, F. (2024). Charting new paths for gender equality and empowerment: Asia-Pacific regional report on Beijing+30 review. [Online]. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/11/charting-new-paths-for-gender-equality-and-empowerment-asia-pacific-regional-report-on-beijing30-review>
- Carelse, A. (2017). *The personal is political: articulating women's citizenship through three African feminist blogs*. Master's thesis, University of Cape Town. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/11427/24893>
- Chaminuka, L. E., Kaseke, K. & Musingafi, M. (2015). Women climbing the political leadership ladder in Africa: Does policy guide practice? *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(6), 50–56.
- Chanda, T.C. (2023). Exploring the interplay between culture and religion in African countries: A case of Zambia. *International Research Journal of Modernization in Engineering Technology and Science*, 5(11), 3139–3148.
- Chanda, T. C. & Ngulube, L. (2024). Women in leadership: Examining barriers to women's advancement in leadership positions. *Asian Journal of Advanced Research and Reports*, 18(6), 273–290. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajarr/2024/v18i6671>
- Chappell, L. (2023). Gender politics and governance in post-colonial Africa: New directions in research and practice. *Journal of African Studies*, 16(2), 45–67.

- Chikwe, C. F., Kuteesa, C. F. & Ediae, A. A. (2024). Gender equality advocacy and socio-economic inclusion: A comparative study of community-based approaches in promoting women's empowerment and economic resilience (2022). *International Journal of Scientific Research Updates*, 8(2), 110–121. <https://doi.org/10.53430/ijrsru.2024.8.2.0066>
- Chiluwa, I. (2025). Women's rights advocacy in Africa. In: Samoilenko, S.A. & Simmons, S. (eds.) *The handbook of social and political conflict*, pp: 393–404. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119895534.ch35>
- Chipunza, S., Chiriac, E. & Stavrou, E. (2021). Impacting lives: Women's leadership in local governance. *Local Government Studies*, 47(2), 254–276.
- Chivangurai, J. (2022). Reconstructing gender dynamics in post-conflict Africa: A focus on women's peacebuilding efforts. *African Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 5(1), 23–43.
- Cornwall, A., Nyamu-Musembi, C. & Molyneux, M. (2020). Gender equality and the politics of change in Africa: Opportunities and outcomes. *Development Studies Research*, 7(1), 210–225.
- Cousins, B. & Wiggins, S. (2022). Gender inclusion in governance: Progress and pitfalls in Africa. *Journal of African Development*, 24(1), 87–105.
- Creswell, J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dery, D. A., Cuthbert, B. K., Nakojah, M. M. & Segbefia, S. K. (2022). Patriarchy and womanhood: The case of the Konkomba woman of the Nanumba North municipality in the Northern region of Ghana. *African Journal of Emerging Issues*, 4(13), 91–110.
- Development Research Centre (IDRC). (2010). *Democratic governance, women's rights and gender equality: Synthesis report*. Available at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/228736183.pdf>
- Diko, M. (2023). Intersectionality and the oppressive incidents of women in the Old Testament and the South African context. *Old Testament Essays*, 36(3), 612–634. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2023/v36n3a5>

## Chapter One

- Donert, C. (2023). Women's rights as human rights after the end of history. *Gender & History*, 35(3), 862–880. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12729>
- Donner, H. & Goddard, V. (2023). Kinship and the politics of responsibility: An introduction. *Critique of Anthropology*, 43(4), 331–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X231217928>
- Du Toit, L. (2023). The legacy of post-colonial governance in African democracies. *Democratization*, 30(1), 123–140.
- Dunne, T. (2024). *International relations theories: Discipline and diversity*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780192866455.001.0001>
- Eferebo, I. (2024). Navigating power and resistance: Ugbabe Ahebi and the Igbo women's uprising against colonial rule 1900–1929. *International Journal of Development Strategies in Humanities, Management and Social Sciences*, 14(2), 120–131.
- Emejulu, A. & Puwar, N. (2019). A manifesto for research on intersectionality in governance. *Public Administration Review*, 79(1), 1–6.
- Ewelukwa, U. (2002). Post-colonialism, gender, customary injustice: Widows in African societies. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 24(2), 424–486. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2002.0021>
- Eyben, R. (2015). Promoting gender equality in the changing global landscape of international development cooperation. In: Coles, A., Gray, L. & Momsen, J. (eds.) *The Routledge handbook of gender and development*, pp: 515–526. New York: Routledge.
- Fleming, S. (2019). *South Africa's Cabinet is now 50% women for the first time ever*. World Economic Forum, 4 Jun 2019. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2019/06/south-africa-s-cabinet-is-now-50-women-for-the-first-time-ever/> [Accessed: 13 May 2020].
- Galappaththi, M., Armitage, D. & Collins, A. M. (2022). Women's experiences in influencing and shaping small-scale fisheries governance. *Fish and Fisheries*, 23(5), 1099–1120. <https://doi.org/10.1111/faf.12672>

- Gebrihet, H. G., Reda, A. A., Geremedhn, M. A. & Abebe, S. A. (2024). Examining women 's equality under the UN Agenda 2030 and the African Agenda 2063: Between rhetoric and reality. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2433148>
- Gluckman, P. D., Spoonley, P., Poulton, R., Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, S. H., Sridhar, H., Clyne, D. & Bardsley, A. (2023). *Addressing the challenges to social cohesion*. Kōi Tū, The Centre for Informed Futures, University of Auckland.
- Gouni, O. & Verny, T. R. (2023). The human toll of collective trauma. *International Journal of Prenatal and Life Sciences*, ISSN:2945-011X. <https://doi.org/10.24946/IJPLS/20231010>
- Gouws, A. & Madsen, D. H. (2021). Beijing+ 25. *Agenda*, 35(2), 3-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2021.1930894>
- Green, E. (2016). Production systems in pre-colonial Africa. The history of African development. Available at: <https://www.aehnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Green.Production-Systems-in-Pre-Colonial-Africa.pdf>
- Hafkin, N. J. & Taggart, N. (2001). Gender, information technology, and developing countries: An analytic study. *Information and Communication Technologies*, 69(1), 1-23.
- Harding, K., Aryeetey, R., Carroll, G., Lasisi, O., Pérez-Escamilla, R. & Young, M. (2019). Breastfeed4Ghana: Design and evaluation of an innovative social media campaign. *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, 16(49). <https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.12909>
- Hassim, S. (2022). Women and the post-conflict reconstruction agenda: Lessons from African contexts. *African Affairs Review*, 64(3), 301-324.
- Hessini, L. (2020). Financing for gender equality and women's rights: The role of feminist funds. *Gender & Development*, 28(2), 357-376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2020.1766830>
- Hillman, W. & Radel, K. (2023). The social, cultural, economic and political strategies extending women's territory by encroaching on patriarchal embeddedness in tourism in Nepal. In: Eger, C., Munar, A.M. & Hsu, C.H.C. (eds.) *Gender and tourism sustainability*, pp: 303-324. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003329541-19>

- Hope, K. N. (2025). Colonial rule and natural resources exploitation in post-colonial Africa. In: Yuni, D.N., Iloh, E.C. & Ngang, C.C. (eds.) *Colonial heritage and the socio-economic development of Africa*, pp: 209–228. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-73695-7\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-73695-7_11)
- Igboin, B. O. (2016). Traditional leadership and corruption in pre-colonial Africa: how the past affects the present. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 42(3), 142–160. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2412-4265/2016/228>
- Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). (2021). *The Role of Political Parties on Women's Participation and Representation*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/the-role-of-political-parties-on-womens-participation-and-representaion-en.pdf>
- International IDEA. (2021). *Women's representation in Africa: Trends and challenges*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/womens-political-participation-africa-barometer-2021>
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). (2021). *Women in National Parliaments*. [Online] Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages> [Accessed: 24 December 2024].
- Joseph, J. (2025). *Mainstreaming gender in local government: A review of political decision-making in the City of Cape Town and Mangaung Metropolitan Municipalities*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-78074-5>
- Julius, L. W. (2025). Navigating the crossroads: Patriarchy and women's rights in Kenya's legal landscape. *Beijing L. Rev.*, 16, 201. <https://doi.org/10.4236/blr.2025.161010>
- Käihkö, I., Gardiner, A. & Mollett, S. (2021). Women's representation in local government: Policy, practice, and challenges. *Local Government Studies*, 47(3), 487–508.
- Kajta, J. (2022). Calling for an alternative emancipation? Female discourses in the Polish radical-nationalist movement. *European Societies*, 24(1), 61–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2022.2032787>

- Kalumba, M., Daka, H., Kalimaposo, K., Phiri, C., Mulenga-Hagane, L. M. & Mugala, A. (2023). Navigation strategies by women into decision-making positions in the Ministry of Education, Zambia. *European Journal of Development Studies*, 3(3), 147–155. <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejdevelop.2023.3.3.276>
- Kamau, M. (2022). Gender and governance in Africa: The role of women in decision-making. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 11(3), 45–61. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2050-4306/2022/11n2a4>
- Kaputu, T. (2024). *Exploring Mechanisms To Improve Female Parliamentarians ‘ Participation In Decision-Making: Case Study Of Namibian National Assembly*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Namibia.
- Karam, A. (2021). Women in political decision-making: Emerging patterns in African governance. *African Governance Review*, 3(2), 42–59.
- Kelly, L. (2019). *Barriers and Enablers for Women’s Participation in Governance in Nigeria*. Department for International Development, UK Government. [Online]. Available at: <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/ndownloader/files/48077263>
- Kpundeh, S. J. (2020). Governance and development in Africa: Critical reflections on past transformations. *African Affairs Review*, 28(3), 194–219.
- Krampe, F. & Oduro, A. (2021). Women’s political representation in Africa: A historical assessment and policy recommendations. *African Affairs*, 120(481), 209–232.
- Krige, D. (2025). The Nation-as-Family Metaphor in Crisis South Africa: Intergenerational Solidarity or National Compliance?. In: Molapo, S. (ed.) *Collective action in post-colonial societies: Beyond the binary of sovereignty and solidarity*, pp: 83–101. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-77547-5\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-77547-5_7)



- Lwamba, E., Shisler, S., Ridlehoover, W., Kupfer, M., Tshabalala, N., Nduku, P., Langer, L., Grant, S., Sonnenfeld, A., Anda, D., Eyers, J. & Snilstveit, B. (2022). Strengthening women's empowerment and gender equality in fragile contexts towards peaceful and inclusive societies: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Campbell Syst Rev.*, 18(1):e1214. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1214>
- Maqashalala, X. (2025). *Discourse and Decolonization: Analyzing the Impact of Colonial History and Culture on African Leadership Narratives*. Doctoral dissertation, Kansas State University. <https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.70000>
- Matlosa, K. & Smit, J. (2017). *Assessing the impact of civil society on democracy in Southern Africa*. SADC Parliamentary Forum.
- Mbeki, T. (2021). African governance: The role of leaders. *African Development Review*, 33(4), 231–244.
- Mechkova, V., Dahlum, S. & Petrarca, C. S. (2024). Women's political representation, good governance and human development. *Governance*, 37(1), 19–38. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12742>
- Meintjes, S. (2010). *Gender governance and democracy: Southern and Eastern Africa*. Series of reports supported by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Department of Political Studies, Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand. IDRC, CRDI, DFID, Canada. [Online]. Available at: <https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/ebc661cb-dboe-435b-ac67-f518ef67b8a3/content>
- Mikell, G. (2023). Financial resources and women's political participation: Systemic barriers in Africa. *African Journal of Political Science*, 18(2), 137–152.
- Mjöberg, I. (2023). Gender equality in Africa: Emerging issues and the impact of state institutions. *Review of African Political Economy*, 50(1), 57–72.
- Mlambo-Ngcuka, M. (2021). The African Union's Commitment to Gender Equality: A Critical Assessment. *International Journal of African Studies*.

## African Women in Governance

- Muriithi, M. (2022). The duality of women's roles in governance: Navigating local and global challenges. *Global Governance*, 28(3), 5–20.
- Murray, C. & Sinclair, M. (2022). The role of civil society in promoting women's governance in Africa. *African Affairs*, 121(485), 635–655.
- Newman, A. (2023). Decolonising social norms change: from 'grandmother-exclusionary bias' to 'grandmother-inclusive' approaches. *Third World Quarterly*, 44(6), 1230–1248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2023.2178408>
- Nsana, S. (2024). *Exploration of higher education qualifications on women's participation and appointment to decision making positions in public administration in Lusaka, Zambia*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Zambia. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.804005>
- Nwakanma, A. P. (2022). From black lives matter to EndSARS: Women's socio-political power and the transnational movement for black lives. *Perspectives on Politics*, 20(4), 1246–1259. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722000019>
- Nzeadibe, T. C. (2020). Gender, governance, and socio-economic development in Africa: Barriers and pathways. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 29(5), 478–491.
- Odame, F. S. (2014). Ghanaian traditional women leaders and sustainable development: The case of Nadowli District Of Ghana. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 10(2013). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2205435>
- Odi, A., Onwujekwe, O., Hutchinson, E., Agwu, P., Orjiakor, C.T., Ogbozor, P., Roy, P., McKee, M. & Balabanova, D. (2022). Absenteeism in primary health centres in Nigeria: leveraging power, politics and kinship. *BMJ Global Health*, 7(12), p.e010542. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2022-010542>
- Olufemi, A. & Delaney, A. (2023). Advancing gender equity: Governance frameworks and women's empowerment in Africa. *South African Journal of Governance*, 29(2), 201–218.

- Omweri, F. S. (2024). A systematic literature review of e-government implementation in developing countries: examining urban-rural disparities, institutional capacity, and socio-cultural factors in the context of local governance and progress towards SDG 16.6. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 8(8), 1173-1199. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.808088>
- Onyango, V., Amollo, A. & Olufemi, A. (2021). Synergies between gender and governance: Charting new territories. *African Governance Review*, 3(1), 17-34.
- Osei, W. & Iddrisu, A. (2020). Barriers to women's political participation in Ghana: Insights and implications. *Journal of African Political Economy*, 5(2), 25-45.
- Osman, S. & B. Abdulai, B. (2018). Obstacles to women's representation and participation in local governance: A case study of Sissala East District of Ghana. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8(10), 132-140.
- Otieno, A. (2022). The impact of leadership on pan-African actions for women's representation. *Journal of African Studies*, 44(2), 189-205.
- Oyugi, S. O. (2024). *The Role of Electoral Competition in ethnic Conflict: A Comparative Analysis of Kenya and Tanzania*. Master's thesis, McGill University, Canada.
- Parashar, S. & Schulz, M. (2021). Colonial legacies, postcolonial 'selfhood' and the (un) doing of Africa. *Third World Quarterly*, 42(5), 867-881. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1903313>
- Pennington, K. (2023). *The prince and the law, 1200-1600: Sovereignty and rights in the Western legal tradition*. Univ of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.8441743>
- Plantinga, P., Dlamini, N. & Gordon, T. (2023). Implementing e-participation in Africa: What roles should public officials play? *ACM Journal on Computing and Sustainable Societies*, 2(2), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3648438>
- Pruitt, L. J. (2020). Revisiting women's political participation and the role of gendered policies in combating inequality. *International Affairs*, 96(5), 1161-1176.

- Ramatswi, T. T. (2025). Exploring the impact of women's leadership and governance towards stability and development: a case study of Limpopo province. *International Journal of Business Ecosystem & Strategy* (2687-2293), 7(2), 153-162. <https://doi.org/10.36096/ijbes.v7i2.749>
- Rowlands, J. (2021). Gender equality and participation in African political systems: A critical analysis. *Journal of African Political Economy*, 12(2), 23-41.
- Saari, E., Lehtonen, M. & Toivonen, M. (2015). Making bottom-up and top-down processes meet in public innovation. *The Service Industries Journal*, 35(6), 325-344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2015.1003369>
- SADC Parliamentary Forum. (2020). *Annual report 2020: The contribution of women in the SADC region*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.sadc.int/pillars/gender-equality-women-empowerment> .
- Sadie, Y. (2014). Gender policy and legislation during the first 20 years of democracy. *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 36(2), 111-125. <https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v36i2.172>
- Samajdar, A. (2023). Balancing representation, participation and capacity for democracy and development: an assessment of India's rural local government system. In: Haque, M. S., Wong, W. & Ko, K. (eds.) *Handbook on Asian public administration*, pp: 327-344. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839104794.00031>
- Sawer, M. (2022). The politics of representation: Women in governance and the implications for policy. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 57(1), 45-67.
- Sengar, N. & Shah, S. R. (2024). Examining the domestic adversities imposed by patriarchy on working women: A sociological perspective. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management*, 11(4), 95-105. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ijssm.v11i4.68209>
- Sharp, J. P. (2022). *Geographies of postcolonialism: Spaces of power and representation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529739107>

- Sibanda, N. (2024). *Eco-social contracting for environmental justice: Assessing the effectiveness of community-based natural resource management* (No. 2024-06). UNRISD Working Paper.
- Singha, S. & Singha, R. (2024). Revisiting African womanhood: Historical archives. In: Musingafi, M. C. C. & Hungwe, C. (eds.) *African womanhood and the feminist agenda*, pp: 186–207. Palmdale, PA: IGI Global Scientific Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-1999-4.ch012>
- Smith, K. & Chappell, L. (2022). Governance and the gender equity agenda: Lessons from Africa. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 45(12), 1079–1090.
- Smith, L. (2023). Reflections on women's role in Africa's liberation movements: Historical contributions and emerging challenges. *African Historical Studies*, 14(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.2307/216189>
- Smith, R. (2022). Gender and local governance in the UK: A comparative analysis. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 31(4), 445–460.
- Southern African Development Community (SADC). (2021). *Gender policy framework for the SADC region*. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-11/SADC\\_GENDER\\_POLICY\\_-\\_ENGLISH.pdf](https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-11/SADC_GENDER_POLICY_-_ENGLISH.pdf)
- Sung, K. & Hock, E. (2019). Gender, politics and the role of male allies in advocacy movements. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 39(3/4), 198–215.
- Tarkhanova, O. (2021). *Compulsory Motherhood, Paternalistic State?: Ukrainian Gender Politics and the Subject of Woman*. Cham: Springer Nature. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73355-1>
- Tchamyou, V. S. (2021). Women, governance, and development in Africa: The imperative for change. *African Journal of Gender and Development*, 10(1), 19–35.
- Tinker, A. (2020). Empowering women for governance: Strategies for enhancing political participation in Africa. *Global Social Policy*, 20(4), 447–462.
- Tripp, A. M. (2023). Mobilizing for gender equality in Africa: Insights from civil society and state responses. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 32(4), 313–331.

- True, J. (2018). The political economy of gender equality: Towards a new institutionalism. *European Journal of International Relations*, 24(1), 171–192.
- United Nations (2007). *Women in Leadership Roles*. United Nations. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/women\\_leadership/On-line\\_discussion\\_report\\_Women\\_in\\_Leadership\\_Roles.pdf](https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/women_leadership/On-line_discussion_report_Women_in_Leadership_Roles.pdf)
- United Nations. (2020). *Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda: A Whole-of-UN Approach*. New York: United Nations.
- United Nations. (2021). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York: United Nations.
- United Nations Women (UN Women). (2017). *Seeking Accountability for Women's Rights through the Sustainable Development Goals*. UnWomen. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.cesr.org/sites/default/files/sdgs\\_accountability\\_womens\\_rights.pdf](https://www.cesr.org/sites/default/files/sdgs_accountability_womens_rights.pdf)
- United Nations Women (UN Women). (2020). *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2020*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2020>
- United Nations Women (UN Women). (2024). *The Status of Women's Movement in Africa*. UN Women. [Online]. Available at: [https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/policy\\_brief-the\\_status\\_of\\_women\\_movement\\_in\\_africa.pdf](https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/policy_brief-the_status_of_women_movement_in_africa.pdf)
- Varriale, C., Maria Pesando, L., Kashyap, R. & Rotondi, V. (2021). Mobile phones and attitudes towards women's participation in politics: Evidence from Africa. *Sociology of Development*, 8(1), 1–37. <https://doi.org/10.1525/sod.2020.0039>
- Walters, L. (2021). *Essays on socio-political factors and economic development*. Doctoral thesis. University of Pretoria. South Africa.
- Wells-Oghoghomeh, A. (2021). *The souls of womenfolk: The religious cultures of enslaved women in the Lower South*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. <https://doi.org/10.5149/northcarolina/9781469663609.001.0001>

## Chapter One

- Wickramasinghe, M. (2021). Women's representation in politics: An analysis of national machineries in South Asia. *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 14(1), 56–74.
- Zuckerman, E. (2021). The politics of gender equality in global governance. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 44(10), 896–905.
- Zulu, M. (2023). Gender justice in local governance: The case of female councillors in Africa. *African Journal of Political Science*, 12(1), 1–22.







## Chapter Two

# ‘You Belong to the Other Room’: Women and Gendering Democratisation in Africa

**Olayide Oladeji** 

*Department of Political Science, Faculty of the Social Sciences  
Ekiti State University   
Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria  
ooladeji@hotmail.com / olayide.oladeji@eksu.edu.ng*

**Samuel Babatola Ayiti** 

*Department of Political Science, Faculty of the Social Sciences  
Ekiti State University   
Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria  
ayitibabatola@gmail.com*

**Olusola Olasupo** 

*Department of History, McMaster University,   
Hamilton ON, Canada  
olasupoo@mcmaster.ca*

## Introduction

Liberal democracy is undoubtedly the most popular form of government globally today. Democracy has been described by Omotoso (2016) as a ‘beautiful bride’ that every state, irrespective of the system of government or regime type in place, wants to associate with. The rising profile of democracy may not be unconnected with its inherent potential to protect and promote individuals’ liberty and the dignity of human persons, mitigate civil and political crises through negotiated consensus, retard the frontiers of malfeasance and promote transparency and accountability in governance by ensuring popular

participation in electoral and policy processes (Oladeji, 2019). Put in other words, democracy is often perceived as synonymous with good and efficient governance because it not only promotes mass participation in policy or governance processes but also makes the policies people-oriented. Consequently, democracy is paraded as a global agenda by civil society organisations, development practitioners, and international development or donor agencies to drive out autocracy and 'governance crisis' by pushing for open and competitive public space and the transparent management of state resources in transitioning states, especially in Africa. Liberal democracy is seen as the best policy to remove Africa from the woods and put it back on track to development and greatness (Oladeji & Ayiti, 2020).

The last three decades or so have witnessed a remarkable shift from the hitherto autocratic military or one-party regimes to competitive multiparty *democratic* politics in Africa. Recently, there has been an autocratic reversion in Africa with military coups in several African countries, including Mali in 2020 and 2021, Chad in 2021, Sudan in 2021, Guinea in 2020, Burkina Faso in 2022, Gabon in 2023, and Niger in 2023. The new wave of democratisation, especially adopting the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (WHO, 2018) and the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, has popularised women's political participation and representation, with gender inclusion as a priority target (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2020). However, a critical assessment of the re-democratisation processes in Africa would reveal a *reincarnation* of the old order of authoritarianism witnessed under military rule or a one-party system. For instance, the new regime of electoral or party politics, instead of pushing the frontiers of popular participation, has ironically helped to shrink the democratic space and strengthen authoritarian tendencies in the form of 'dominant ruling parties', sit-tight *big man* leadership, and more importantly *male-biased democratisation*. The democratic experiences in many parts of Africa have worked to de-democratise the public space, while electoral politics is an antinomy of democracy (Momoh, 2015). However, democracy may seem in trouble almost everywhere in the world and

needs urgent revival. Its value, viability, and future are more contented now than ever in modern history, or at least since the 1930s (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [International IDEA], 2019).

No wonder, African democracy is ranked very low (41%) compared to 100% in North America, 93% in Europe, and 86% in Latin America. Africa only ranks better than the Middle East at 17%. African democracies are classified as weak, with the continent having the highest number of weak democracies in the world (International IDEA, 2019). The challenge of de-democratisation in Africa can be linked to limited gender equality, as male-dominated democratic processes hinder the broader involvement of women in politics and governance. Interestingly, despite its reputation for poor democratic standards (International IDEA, 2019), Rwanda stands out for its high level of women's political participation and gender equality (African Union Commission-Women, Gender and Youth Directorate [AUC-WGYD], 2022; Memusi, 2021).

It has been argued that the wellness of a democratic society is not only decided by the availability of suitable democratic organisations but also by the degree of freedom given to various social groups to take part in these organisations (Moghadam, 2008). That is, liberal democracy is not only conceivable in terms of democratic institutions – political parties, elections, checks and balances, constitutionalism, and so on – but also by inclusive citizenship and participation rights (Oladeji, 2019). In other words, democratic processes must engender equal power distribution and influence between a plurality of social groups, especially men and women, within a society. Women's political participation is essential to democratisation – democratic consolidation. Consequently, the empowerment of women and the establishment of gender parity and equity are critical elements of liberal democracy. Put in another sense, while women need democracy to flourish – to demand and exercise inclusive participatory rights in public affairs – democracy equally needs women to build a representative and inclusive system of government. In other words, the *gender* of democracy matters! Excluding women from active participation in public

affairs invariably results in what Moghadam (2008) calls *male democracy*, which results in gendering democratisation.

Thus, drawing on the democratisation experience in Nigeria since 1999, this chapter examines the issues of gendering democratisation in Africa. Specifically, the chapter examines the implications of the expression 'you belong to my other room' credited to President Muhammad Buhari in teasing out socio-cultural practices that continue to pose problems for inclusive citizenship and equal power relations between men and women in African democratic politics. The study was wholly qualitative, and data was gathered mainly from secondary sources. The study utilised a content analysis technique to analyse the data gathered. The rest of the chapter is arranged into a statement of the problem, a conceptual and theoretical review, women and democratisation in Nigeria, the other room and male democracy in Nigeria, a conclusion, and recommendations.

## **The Problematic**

Women occupy a very significant position in every society. Throughout history, women have been instrumental in driving the socioeconomic progress of their communities. In the specific case of Africa, historical evidence abounds to show that women had and have been contributing immensely to the economic development of their societies. Women have assumed such roles as mothers, home managers, producers, community organisers, political activists, and custodians of societal history. However, despite the key roles of women, evidence throughout the ages and societies reveals that there has been a preponderance of domination of males over females. Virtually all cultures, through the combination of traditional norms and practices that favour men, support discrimination against women whether at home, in school, in the office, at worship centres, and more importantly, in politics and governance.

In the specific case of Nigeria and Africa, women were known to be politically active and included in the decision-making processes in the traditional pre-colonial societies. In fact, in the traditional societies of present-day Nigeria,

women occupied such important positions as *Ìyálóde*, *Ìyál'òjà*, veteran warriors, and even the highest political position of being crowned queens. For instance, ample historical evidence indicates that women such as Efusetan Aniwura of Ibadan, Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Ile-Ife, Emotan of the Benin Kingdom, Omu Okwei of Ossomari, Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana, Queen Iyannegi of the Mossi people in Burkina Faso, Candace Kush of Kush in Ethiopia, and Madam Yoko of Mende in Sierra Leone played key roles in the development of their societies. These women held influential political offices and played essential and complementary roles in economic, social, and cultural spheres in their respective communities. For instance, the city of Zaria in present-day Kaduna state was founded by a woman called Bakwa Turuku, who had a daughter known as Amina. Amina, who succeeded her mother as the Queen of Zaria, was a great warrior who built a high wall to defend the city against invasion, extended its boundaries, and transformed it into a major commercial hub. Similarly, Mọremí Àjàsòrò was a legendary Queen of Ile-Ife, renowned for liberating Ife from constant raids by the Ugbo (Igbo) Kingdom (Orisadare, 2021). See Kolawole, et al. (2012) for a nuanced understanding of women's political participation and representation during the Nigerian pre-colonial period.

However, studies have shown that the inclusive nature of traditional African societies was reversed with the advent of colonialism, especially because of the hierarchical structure of the colonial administration, which favoured men over women (Madsen, 2021; Ntiwunka & Nwaodike, 2021; Orisadare, 2021; Ingyoroko et al., 2017; Guyo, 2017; Agbalajobi, 2010; Yetunde, 2003). The colonialists introduced several policies and legislations that promoted patriarchy in Africa. In the British West African Colonies, gender-biased policies and legislation were introduced, which promoted patriarchy and discriminated against women. For instance, in Nigeria, the colonial indirect rule policy, imposition of taxes, and the appointment of Warrant Chiefs resulted in oppression against women. With the adoption of indirect rule, all powers resided in the colonial administrators through the traditional chiefs and customary elites, where

women were entirely excluded from decision-making and governance – which meant no female participation in communal affairs or Nigerian politics (Byfield, 2012).

Similarly, in Kenya, the shift of decision-making from local traditional mechanisms of power to the colonial capital or metropole resulted in a diminished influence for women, who had previously informally influenced the political decisions of male kin (Kilonzo & Akallah, 2021). Memusi (2021) discusses how colonialism impacted Maasai communities and women's political representation. She observes that the indirect ruling system allowed male leaders to redefine relationships and roles, leading to the exclusion and subordination of women in the political and domestic spheres. Memusi highlights how male political authority and economic control were strengthened through new sources of power and control over land for agriculture and cattle. The codification of customary law, perpetuated and protected by the Native Authorities and Native Authority Courts, highlighted the dominance of men and the powerlessness of women (Wambui, 2016).

While the French colonial empire initially granted voting and citizenship rights irrespective of gender, this changed after the Second World War. Thus, specific laws in each colony divided the empire's inhabitants into different citizenship categories, each with modified rights and obligations in the policy of association (Ntiwunka & Nwaodike, 2021). In the specific case of Senegal, especially in the four urban sites of Dakar, Rufisque, Saint-Louis, and the island of Gorée, under the new selective suffrage, black women became citizens who could not vote (Fransee, 2016). Colonialism, therefore, reinforced the status and authority of men and created a new gender hierarchy in colonial Africa (Guyo, 2017).

Consequently, the post-colonial African state evolved into a patriarchal system, which a scholar defines as 'rule by men' (Heywood, 2007:98). Furthermore, the preponderance of military rule in Africa almost immediately after independence cemented male dominance of the political and administrative space with women relegated to the peripheries of public affairs.

Consequently, with the new wave of democratisation in Africa since the early 1980s, there is renewed hope for political inclusion to ensure gender parity between men and women. However, instead of the new democratisation bringing about political equality, it has been gendered, with men dominating the political space. Many factors can be attributed to this significant situation, including cultural, socio-economic, and political or constitutional issues. This shows that the African democratic experience is still far from being inclusive in terms of gender parity. Therefore, this chapter addresses the following questions: Do gender issues matter in democracy or democratisation? Has democratisation in Africa ensured gender parity or inequality? What could be done to ensure political inclusion for women in Africa? To answer these questions, as noted before, the chapter draws mainly on the Nigerian democratic experience from 1999 to date.

## **Gender and Democratisation: A Conceptual Review**

In everyday usage or parlance, gender is usually seen as a synonym for sex. Gender is often viewed in everyday practices as a dichotomy between women and men. However, gender is not a synonym for women, nor is it a derogatory stigma for the male opposite sex. While sex is a biological distinction between a male and female, there is something much more than this categorisation in the issue of gender. For instance, the language of gender, rather than just speaking about the sexes – men and women – as something natural or innate, speaks of these categories or identities as being ‘socially constructed’ (Randall, 2011). The implication is that these categories are not fixed but are historically and culturally varied, while gender connotes “a constructed inequality between men and women” (Enemuo, 1999:227). Put in another way, perceptions of gender are not rigid or fixed; instead, they vary over time and space and are determined by several factors, especially cultural values. Aina (2012:6) puts this in perspective when she argues that gender attributes are culturally specific and are subject to change across cultures and historical epochs. She further argues that each cultural system creates a set of beliefs and practices for men and

women that define their relationship. Therefore, the definition of gender must understand the situation or relation of men and women together and not in isolation.

In other words, gender points to essentialist arguments about women's nature that are often invoked to justify their political exclusion. Additionally, it opens up the possibility that women are too differentiated as a category for making meaningful political claims (Randall, 2011). But beyond being a subject category, gender is equally used in institutions as being *gendered*. In this sense, political institutions presuppose embodiments of gender relationships while at the same time influencing the construct of gender categories within society (Connell, 1990). It is from this standpoint that we can speak of gendered democratisation or gendered democratic institutions. But what does it mean for democratic institutions or democratisation to be gendered? Before answering this question, it is necessary to understand democratisation. Democratisation, just like the democracy from which it is derived, is essentially a nebulous and contested concept. However, democratisation involves efforts made to entrench stable democracy and ensure political liberalisation of the public sphere. In other words, democratisation is shedding undemocratic norms, cultures, and practices by 'embracing and strengthening or extending the principles, mechanisms, and institutions that define a democratic regime' (Osaghae, 1999:7).

Democratisation is the process or mechanism through which a society or regime becomes a democracy and deepens democratic culture and norms. That is, democratisation opens up the public space for equality of rights amongst members of society. It can, therefore, be argued that gendered democratisation normatively essentialised or mainstreamed gender to ensure democratic equality between women and men. According to Moghadam (2008), gendering democratisation aims at dismantling unequal power relations and/or distribution between men and women by institutionalising democratic policies and practices that reduce inequalities between men and women and increase the participation, representation, and leadership of women in politics and governance. Therefore, to



prevent ‘democracy without democrats’, policies to protect women’s rights and to increase women’s participation in political parties, the judiciary, executive, parliament, and civil society is essential. Put in another way, since democracy is about popular political participation, women’s political exclusion either constitutes a major shortcoming of existing democracies or it means that they do not qualify as democracies at all (Randall, 2011, 2).

Empirical studies have established a strong correlation between women’s status in a country and the health of democracy in that country. For instance, the research paper of Ortiz et al. (2023) shows that the status of women is strongly and significantly associated with all three dimensions of democracy – election integrity, freedom of association and assembly, and checks on executive power – with election integrity showing the strongest relationship. Their chapter demonstrates that women’s status and democratic health in a country are strongly correlated. Similarly, the article by Nchofoung et al. (2023) finds that “political inclusion (political empowerment, civil liberty, political participation, and civil society participation) leads to better democratic (liberal, electoral, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian) standards” (p. 149). Similar findings, especially that gender political inclusion (women’s empowerment) enhances democracy, were reported by Nikooghadam et al. (2018) and Lindberg (2004).

As argued by Asongu et al. (2021), the political inclusion of women encompasses a process that aims to enhance the benefits accessible to women, thereby increasing their capacity to influence political ideologies, engage in civil society organisations, and exercise their rights and freedoms. Because women make up the majority of the population in most countries, denying the majority of the population political rights will make a country nondemocratic (Nchofoung et al., 2023). Thus, gendering democratisation aims to transform the democratic systems supposedly developed by men to disproportionately disadvantage women against men to bring about gender equality in participation in politics and governance. Gender democratisation aims to establish

democracy amongst all genders, not just in theory, but also by acknowledging and respecting diversity through equal rights and opportunities. It is a model and organisational principle that seeks to dismantle and transform gender-based hierarchies and roles, which are still structural issues in social institutions and organisations (Gunda Werner Institute, n.d.).

Consequently, a key issue about gendering democratisation is ensuring inclusive citizenship and participation in government and dismantling socio-cultural obstacles to gender parity between men and women. To achieve gender democratisation, there is a need for socio-cultural change that will transform attitudes and people's lifestyles. In fact, and as argued by Wollstonecraft (1791, cited in Oluwaniyi, 2016:442), there can be little, if any, progressive political change without restructuring the sphere of private relations, and there can be no satisfactory restructuring of the private without major transformations in governing institutions. Thus, support for gender equality is not considered just a consequence of democratisation; it is a central component of the process of democratisation and the prerequisite for the creation of a sustainable democracy (Oluwaniyi, 2016:442). That is, gender democratisation and women's rights could not only be achieved through constitutional or legal means but also through a socialisation process that would recognise and entrench legal rights that promote women's interests and heighten their participation in politics and governance.

## **Women and Democratisation in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

Nigeria's Fourth Republic started on 29 May 1999, when the military junta of Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar handed over the reins of power to the democratically elected president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Incidentally, the Fourth Republic has been the longest democratic experience in the country's history. It has lasted more than two decades and witnessed the transition from one civilian regime to another and the peaceful transfer of political power from a defeated ruling political party to the

opposition. However, Nigeria's democratic experience since 1999 is still fledgling and remarkably constrained by serious flaws (Oladeji & Ayiti, 2020; Oladeji, 2019). This may have led a scholar of democracy to contend that Nigeria's democratic experience in the Fourth Republic is 'trapped in transition' (Omotola, 2013:171-200). The trapped transition is primarily because of the failure of the democratic process to enhance its democratic qualities, particularly its inability to open the political space for equal opportunities for all groups and interests. The democratic process in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is gendered and has not brought about equal rights and opportunities for men or women in the political arena.

As noted earlier, democracy and democratisation are about the fair representation of all interests and groups in society, especially women and men. However, the Nigerian democratic experience since 1999 has been male-dominated, with women's participation very queasy. Since 1999, Nigeria has been under six administrations, with the executive and the legislative arms of these administrations dominated by men. For example, since 1999, there has been neither a female president nor a female vice president. From 1999 to 2007, President Olusegun Obasanjo was in office. President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua then served as president from 2007 to 2010, followed by President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan from 2010 to 2015. Muhammadu Buhari held the presidency from 2015 to 2023, and currently, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has been in office since 2023.

Furthermore, appointments to Federal Boards of Public Corporations have followed the same pattern of male dominance over women. For instance, between 1999 and 2003, only 7 (5.6%) women were appointed as Board members out of 130 appointed for the period. Equally, out of 47 Ministers appointed by the Olusegun Obasanjo administration during the same period, just 7 (14.8%) of them were women. Women enjoyed more appointments in 2011, with 12 (30%) women appointed as Ministers out of 42, while 4 (20%) women out of 20 were appointed as Special Advisers to the President. While President Muhammadu Buhari appointed 6 (16.7%) women as Ministers out of 36, the incumbent, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu,

appointed 8 (17.8%) women as Ministers out of 45. Also, the state executive level has been predominated by male governors, except for 16 elected female deputy governors between 1999 and 2019. During the 18 March 2023 governorship elections in Nigeria, no female candidate was elected as governor. Out of the 24 female deputy governorship candidates, only six were elected (*Daily Trust*, 2023).

Furthermore, males have been dominant in the federal and state parliaments in the country. The data from Figure 1 clearly shows that the Senate has been predominantly male since 1999, with the highest number of female members, 8 (7.3%) out of 109 members, occurring in 2007 and 2015. This trend is also observed in the House of Representatives, as shown in Figure 2, where the highest female membership of 26 (7.2%) out of 360 members was recorded in 2011. From Figures 1 and 2, it is observed that the Nigerian 10<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, with women occupying 3 out of 109 seats (2.8%) in the Senate and 17 out of 360 seats in the House of Representatives (4.7%), which represents 4.3% of the 469-member Assembly, is not significantly different from the 9<sup>th</sup> National Assembly in terms of women's representation. The Figures show that after seven general election cycles, the number of women in the Senate of the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly has dropped to what it was in 1999 when Nigeria returned to democracy. The situation is not different in the State Houses of Assembly, where only in Ekiti and Kwara States did women record 23% and 21% representation respectively during the 2023 elections into state assemblies. In some states, no woman was elected into the assemblies (See Figure 3).

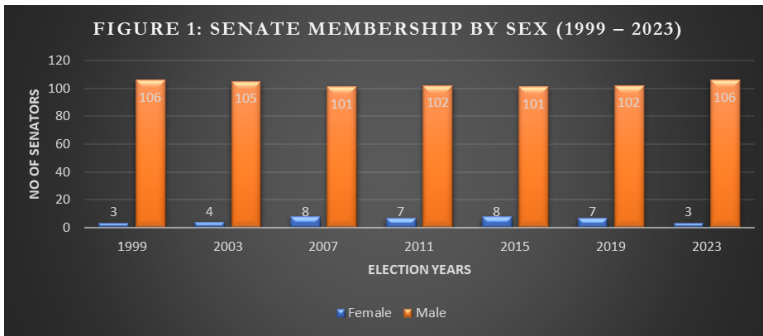


**Figure 1:** Senate Membership by Sex (1999–2023). Source: Compiled by authors using media reports.

We can, therefore, argue that Nigerian democratisation since 1999 is gendered and women have not enjoyed political inclusion and empowerment in the country. However, while the executive in Nigeria is gendered, it has not been a completely gloomy situation continent-wide in Africa. A major milestone in female presidency in Africa was achieved in 2005 when Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected in a competitive electoral process as president of Liberia. Similarly, Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila was elected the first female Namibian Prime Minister in 2015. She has occupied the position since then. In Mauritius, Ameenah Gurib-Fakim was the first woman to be elected as the ceremonial President in June 2015. However, she had to step down in March 2018 following a corruption allegation (Ramtohul, 2021). In October 2018, Sahle-Work Zewde was elected as the first woman President of Ethiopia and she is currently Africa's only woman head of state. Furthermore, after the death of President John Magufuli, on 19 March 2021, Samia Suluhu Hassan was sworn in as the first woman President of the United Republic of Tanzania to serve out Mugufuli's second five-year term and she remains the only woman executive president in Africa.

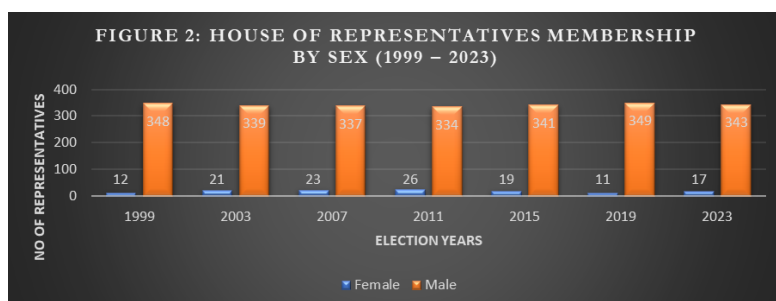


**Figure 2:** House of Representatives Membership by Sex (1999 – 2023). Source: Compiled by authors using media reports

According to the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC, 2023), “as of December 2022 with a ranking of 183 out of 187 Nigeria was (and still is) the African country with the lowest number of women in parliament”. In Nigeria, low female parliamentary representation may be because of adherence to the plurality majority (first-past-the-post) electoral systems and refusal to adopt affirmative action policies such as gender quotas in parliament. Inversely, countries like Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Rwanda, and Uganda have been able to achieve a high level of women’s representation through the adoption of various affirmative action policies like legislative candidate quotas, reserved seat quotas, and voluntary candidate or party quotas (PLAC, 2023). Legislative candidate quotas require political parties to field a minimum percentage of women candidates, which could be achieved by conditional amendment or electoral law. Reserved seat quotas require a certain number or percentage of seats in Parliament to be set aside for underrepresented groups, especially women. This ensures a guaranteed minimum number or percentage of women in the parliament. Voluntary candidate or party quotas are non-binding targets pledged by political parties. As of June 2024, five African countries – Rwanda, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, and Mozambique – are amongst the top 20 nations for women’s parliamentary representation. Incredibly, Rwanda leads the rest of the world as the country with the highest number of women in parliament (61.3%) (IPU, 2024). Despite the increase in the

number of women in African parliaments, Mama (2013) cautions that “gender equality becomes more challenging as one ascends the political hierarchy.” Similarly, Memusi (2021) argues that the affirmative action policy adopted in some countries has had negative consequences as women limit themselves to those special seats and that politics is still dominated by political patronage involving huge costs for women.

### **‘You Belong to the Other Room’: Women and Male Democracy in Nigeria**

As noted above, Nigerian or African democratisation has been dominated by men, with the political space almost entirely closed against women. This development has given room for *male democracy*. With the political space almost closed against women, most men believe that women are supposed to take care of their *homes* – a belief also held by many women, while the murky waters of politics are left for men to swim in. Society frowns at women venturing into politics, and when they do, it must not be in opposition to their husbands’ directives or positions. Since the historic inception of Buhari’s administration in Nigeria, he has been criticised on many fronts, especially for being biased against women. However, some of the fiercest criticisms of the administration have come from the President’s wife, Aisha Buhari! For instance, in an interview with the *BBC Hausa* in October 2016, apparently out of frustration with the way things are going under her husband’s watch, Mrs Buhari stated that she may not support her husband’s second term bid, come 2019, if things remain the same. She is particularly worried that most people appointed by the President are unknown to him and were only forced on him by a cabal of opportunists, who have hijacked the government. She stated:

The president does not know 45 out of 50 of the people he appointed. I don’t know this either, despite being his wife of 27 years... These people had been sitting down in their homes, folding their arms, only for them to be called to come and head an agency or a ministerial position. A lot of people have been coming...to tell him that things are

not going the way they should. If it continues like this, I'm not going to be part of any re-election movement again (NBC News, 2016).

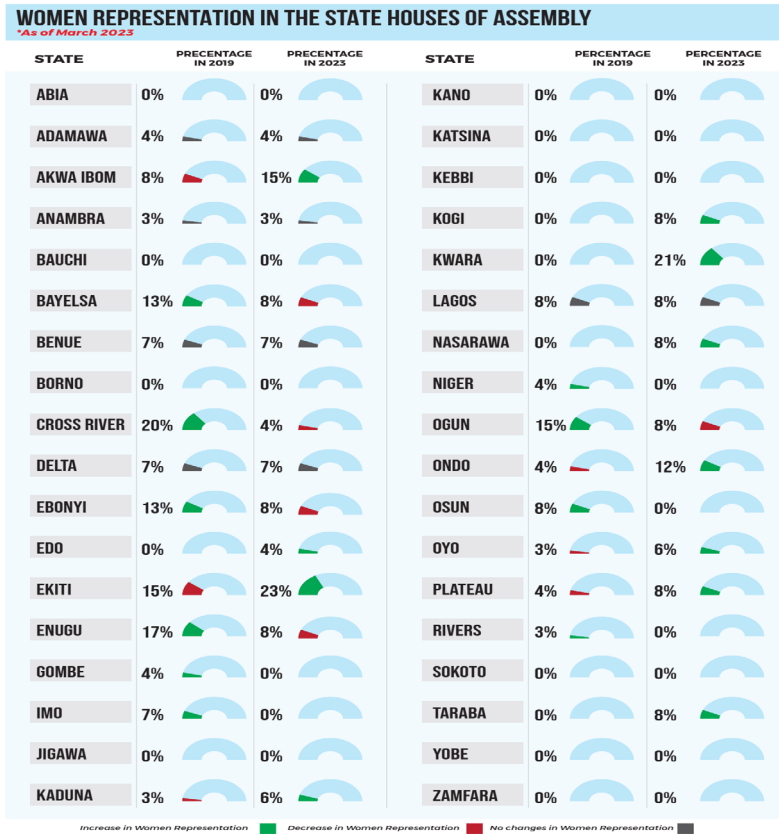


**Figure 3:** Women's representation in the State Houses of Assembly. Source: Adapted from PLAC (2023).

Apart from the interview with the *NBC News*, Mrs Buhari is equally known to maintain an adequate presence on social media through which she has, either directly or by reacting to other people's posts, bared her mind on some issues of national importance, regardless of whose ox is gored. For example, in a reaction to a post on Facebook by Senator Shehu Sani, who had alleged that in the absence of the president, "the sycophantic



prayers for the lion's recovery had waned", she posted on her Facebook page that "God has answered the prayers of the weaker animals. The hyenas and jackals will soon be sent out of the kingdom. We strongly believe in the prayers and support of the weaker animals" (*Vanguard*, 2018).

We inferred that Mrs Buhari was talking about the opportunists' cabal, who dominated President Buhari's government, as hyenas and jackals in the post. Moreover, the then-First Lady of Nigeria was in the habit of retweeting some tweets of the opposition on *Twitter (X)* about the failings of the Buhari-led government. For instance, she reposted a tweet of Senator Ben Murray-Bruce, a Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Senator from Bayelsa state, wherein he criticised the Buhari government for not doing enough to protect citizens against the killings of herdsmen in Benue State and other places (*Vanguard*, 2018). With these damning reactions to or comments about her husband's administration, Aisha Buhari must have eaten the forbidden fruit and must face the consequences. Consequently, in faraway Germany, while fielding questions from journalists, apparently to dismiss the criticisms from his wife and to affirm his lordship over her, President Buhari stated:

I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but *my wife belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room*. It is not easy to do away with opposition or people who did not follow you along your campaign trail. I hope my wife will remember that I was in the field for 12 years; I tried three times, and the fourth time I managed to succeed. And I ended up the first three times in the Nigerian Supreme Court, so I *claim superior knowledge over her...* It is not easy to satisfy the whole Nigerian opposition or to participate in the government (*The Sun*, 2016).

Ironically, Mr Buhari made his statement while standing next to the then-German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who was reputed to have been one of the most powerful women in the world. But what are the implications of Buhari's statement for gendering democratisation in Nigeria or Africa? First, it suggests that women's roles in society should be limited to being wives with

the traditional responsibilities of bearing children, cooking for their husbands, or taking care of their families and not being in political competition with men in politics. Second, it reinforces the cultural sentiments that men are more knowledgeable and invariably superior to women. Thus, if men are superior, women must not only take instructions from their husbands but also always support their husbands, even when they are wrong. It becomes even more abominable for a woman to attack her husband in public. This must be what Reuben Abati had in mind while reacting to Mrs Buhari's outburst on her husband's administration when he wrote:

It is very rare in politics to see a First Lady publicly slamming her husband. Many First Ladies and other women married to politicians have stood with their husbands through thick and thin, even when their husbands were doing things much worse than appointing people their wives did not approve of... If she had concerns about his leadership, she should have raised them with him in private, but not by disparaging him in public. She should have protected his reputation in public, even if she may have disagreed with him in private, at least to avoid washing dirty linen in public. The biggest challenge a man can face is to have his wife 'fight' him in public (Abati, 2016).

Third, it shows that in most cases, women's – especially married women's – citizenship rights are contingent on those of men or their husbands. To such an extent, as noted before, a woman can only exercise her political rights if granted by her husband, and while doing so, it must be to reinforce or protect her husband's political interest or image. This is exactly what Abati (2016) had in mind when he stated that “with all the reported cases of dalliance and cuckoldry during the Bill Clinton Presidency, Hillary Clinton stood by her husband”. Guyo (2017) observes that women in Africa are another form of property to be controlled, probably by men. Fourth, it is capable of producing feelings of low efficacy amongst women, which can impede

their active interest in an area normally portrayed as male-defined and male-occupied, such as politics and governance.

From the foregoing, it can be safely argued that the democratic space or democratisation in Nigeria is far from being ungendered based on equality between men and women. Gender inequality mostly finds footing in the patriarchal cultural nature of society. This patriarchal structure of society is based on the assumption of social-biological theory, which assumes that biological dissimilarities between sexes – men and women – are responsible for the division of labour in societies based on sex. Supporters of the theory believed that women were naturally created as weaklings, who could only handle domestic menial duties of cooking and tendering to their husbands and children, while men should handle hard labour including brain-tasking and energy-sapping tasks of politicking and governing (Izugbara, 2013).

### **Gendering Democratisation: Concluding Remarks**

The chapter uses the democratisation in Nigeria since 1999 and a *derogatory* response of President Buhari to his wife's comment about his government to show that democratic practices in Africa are still mostly based on patriarchal *male democracy*. The chapter shows that the political structure in Nigeria favours men against women, which is based on the assumed cultural and biological superiority of men. This clearly shows that the ideological basis of most societies in Africa is very undemocratic and unfair to women. It has raised questions about the morality and rationality of the organisational structure of political systems in Africa. It demonstrates that democratisation in Africa is far from being neither ungendered nor, clearly so, it is gendering. What could therefore be done to activate gendering democratisation in Africa? In our opinion, the best way out of the conundrum is a 'gender political opportunity structure' (Rodríguez Gustá & Madera, 2017:93).

The concept of political opportunity structure is originally from the literature on social movements and refers to formal political structures, as well as the capabilities and configuration

of political elites that permit the eventual success of social movements. The concept has been expanded by feminist sociologists to include political dynamics and cultural meanings that frame relations amongst actors, especially men and women. Applying this concept to this chapter means abandoning a 'restrictive paradigm', through which the democratisation process is stripped of the mobilisation of social interests. That is, the democratisation processes should be structured in such a way as to bring about equal opportunities for men and women in the judiciary, executive, and legislative arms of government. The important elements of the gender political opportunity include the existence of a greater presence of women in politics, especially in parliament, to push agendas in favour of women, the density of the links between the state and social organisations in the context of devolution, and a legacy of civil society mobilisation. It equally involves discursive content as a vehicle for meanings that frame the exercise of rights (Ball & Charles, 2006).

Conclusively, gendering democratisation will involve three dimensions – organisational, discursive, and relational. The first dimension will involve effective women's rights advocacy for civil society groups, women's caucuses in parliament, and commissions for gender equality to formulate gender policies. The discursive dimension will focus on the conceptions regarding the recognition and full exercise of rights embedded in the organisational repertoires. Lastly, the relational dimension involves the links or interactions that the repertoires allow and through which parliamentarians engage actors in the other arms of government. Thus, to engender gendering democratisation, the interactions of these three dimensions must translate gender inequality into a national or regional agenda for socio-political action. In other words, and as Wollstonecraft (in Oluwaniyi, 2016:442), argued, "if the modern world is to be free of tyranny, not only must divine rights of kings be contested, but also the divine rights of husbands as well". Consequently, gendering democratisation in Africa will require the shedding of some old, obnoxious cultural practices which see women as men's *property*. Equally, it requires open political space and equal

opportunities for men and women. That is, women's political rights as citizens, beyond being wives and home managers, must be recognised to stop *male democracy* in Africa.

## References

- Abati, R. (2016). Aisha Buhari's poor understanding of power. *The Cable*, 16 October 2016.[Online]. Available at: [https://www.thecable.ng/aisha-buharis-poor-understanding-power?utm\\_source=nnd&utm\\_medium=twitter&utm\\_campaign=nnd](https://www.thecable.ng/aisha-buharis-poor-understanding-power?utm_source=nnd&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=nnd) [Accessed: 18 May 2020].
- African Union Commission-Women, Gender and Youth Directorate [AUC-WGYD] (2022). *Women of Impacts: Inspiring Stories of African Women Leaders*. Addis Ababa: African Union Commission.
- Agbalajobi, D.T. (2010). Women's participation and the political process in Nigeria: Problems and prospects. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 4(2), 75–82.
- Aina, O. I. (2012). *Two Halves make a Whole: Gender at the Grassroots of the Nigerian Development Agenda*. The 250th Inaugural Lecture Series, Obafemi Awolowo University.
- Asongu, S., Adegboye, A. & Nnanna, J. (2021). Promoting female economic inclusion for tax performance in sub-Saharan Africa. *Economic Analysis and Policy*, 69(2021), 159–70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eap.2020.11.010>
- Asongu, S. & Odhiambo, N. (2020). Inequality and the economic participation of women in sub-Saharan Africa: An empirical investigation. *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies*, 11(2), 193–206. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AJEMS-01-2019-0016>
- Ball, W. & Charles, N. (2006). Feminist social movements and policy change: Devolution, childcare and domestic violence policies in Wales. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29(2), 172–183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2006.03.003>
- BBC News (2016). *Nigeria's President Buhari: My wife belongs in Kitchen*. BBC News, 14 October 2016. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37659863> [Accessed: 18 May 2020].

- Byfield, J. (2012). Gender, justice, and the environment: Connecting the dots. *African Studies Review*, 55(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2012.0017>
- Connell, R. W. (1990). The state, gender and sexual politics: Theory and appraisal. *Theory and Society* 19(5), 507–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00147025>
- Daily Trust. (2023). *Meet Nigeria's 6 female deputy governors-elect*. Daily Trust, 2 April 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://dailytrust.com/meet-nigerias-6-female-deputy-governors-elect/> [Accessed: 28 September 2024].
- Fransee, E., L. (2016). Senegal: Gender and colonial legacy. *Perspectives on History: The Democracy Issue*, 54(6).
- Enemuo, F. C. (1999). Gender and women empowerment. In: Anifowose, R. & Enemuo, F. C. (eds.) *Elements of politics*. Lagos: Sam Iroanusi Publishers.
- Gunda Werner Institute (n.d.). Gender Democracy as Vision and Organisational Principle. <https://www.gwi-boell.de/en/gender-democracy> [Accessed: 13 August 2025].
- Guyo, F. (2017). Colonial and post-colonial changes and impact on pastoral women's roles and status. *Pastoralism Research, Policy & Practise*, 7(13). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13570-017-0076-2>
- Heywood, A. (2007). *Politics*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Ingyoroko, M., Sugh, E. T. & Alakali, T. T. (2017). The Nigerian woman and the reformation of the political system: A historical perspective. *Journal of Socialomics*, 6(2), 1000196.
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [International IDEA] (2019). *The Global State of Democracy 2019: Addressing the Ills, Reviving the Promise*. Strömsborg: IDEA.
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). (2024). *Monthly ranking of women in national parliament*. IPU, 1 June 2024. [Online]. Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=6&year=2024>.
- Izugbara, C. O. (2013). Contemporary gender studies; Roots, approaches and future direction. In: Ekpe, A. E. & Akpan, O. (eds.) *Readings in international political economy*. Yaoundé, Cameroon: Book House.

## Chapter Two

- Kilonzo, S. M. & Akallah, J. A. (2021). Women in colonial East Africa. In: Yacob-Haliso, O. & Falola, T. (eds.) *The Palgrave handbook of African women's studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4\\_127](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4_127)
- Kolawole, T. O., Abubakar, M. B., Owonibi, E. & Adebayo, A. A. (2012). Gender and party politics in Africa with reference to Nigeria. *Online Journal of Education Research*, 1(7), 132–44.
- Lindberg, S. I. (2004). Women's empowerment and democratization: The effects of electoral systems, participation, and experience in Africa. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 39(1), 28–53. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02686314>
- Madsen, D. H. (ed.) (2021). *Gendered institutions and women's political representation in Africa*. London: Zed Books Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755637829>
- Mama, A. (2013). Pan-Africanism: beyond survival to renaissance? *Address to the African Union 50th Anniversary Heads of State Summit*, Addis Ababa, on 28 June 2013.
- Memusi, S. S. (2021). Experiences of gender equality legislation in Kenya: The role of institutions and actors. In: Madsen, D. H. (ed.) *Gendered institutions and women's political representation in Africa*. London: Zed Books Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755637829.ch-006>
- Moghadam, V. M. (2008). *The Gender of Democracy: The Link Between Women's Rights and Democratisation in the Middle East*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. [Online]. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2008/08/the-gender-of-democracy-the-link-between-womens-rights-and-democratization-in-the-middle-east?lang=en> [Accessed: 18 May 2020].
- Momoh, A. (2015). *Does Democracy have a Future in Africa? Complexifying a Dualism, Creating African Futures in an Era of Global Transformations: Challenges and Prospects*. CODESRIA, 8–12 June.
- NBC News. (2016). *Nigerian First Lady Aisha Buhari Says She may not Vote for her Husband*. NBC News, 14 October 2016. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/nigeria-first-lady-aisha-buhari-says-she-may-not-vote-n666256>. [Accessed: 18 May 2020].

- Nchofoung, T., Asongu, S., Tchamyou, V. & Edo, O. (2023). Gender, political inclusion, and democracy in Africa: Some empirical evidence. *Politics & Policy*, 51(1), 137–155. <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12505>
- Nikooghdam, M., Amirabad, M. G. & Khoshnoodi, A. (2018). The effect of women empowerment on the democracy development. *Women in Development & Politics*, 16(4), 621–40. <https://doi.org/10.22059/jwdp.2019.263033.1007470>
- Ntiwunka, G. U. & Nwaodike, C. A. (2021). Women and colonialism in West Africa. In: Yacob–Haliso, O. & Falola, T. (eds.) *The Palgrave handbook of African women’s studies*, pp: 1169–1184. London: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4\\_130](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4_130)
- Oladeji, I. O. (2019). *Indigeneity, Democratic Citizenship and Governance in Southwest Nigeria (1999–2017)*. Doctoral thesis, Department of Political Science, Ekiti State University.
- Oladeji, I. O. & Ayiti, S. B. (2020). Perverse electoral politics and securitised youths: Implications for peace and security in Nigeria. *Ayika: Journal of Environment and Politics in Africa*, 2(2), 86–114.
- Oluwaniyi, O. O. (2016). Women and the politics of representation in Nigeria’s democratic governance: An analysis of the legislative elections from 1999 to 2011. In: Omotoso, F. & Kehinde, M. (eds.) *Democratic governance and political participation in Nigeria: 1999–2014*. Denver & Bamenda: Spears Media Press.
- Omotola, J.S. (2013). Trapped in transition? Nigeria’s first democratic decade and beyond. *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, 9(2), 171–200.
- Omotoso, F. (2016). Democratic governance and political participation: Introduction to the issues. In: Omotoso, F. & Kehinde, M. (eds.) *Democratic governance and political participation in Nigeria: 1999–2014*. Denver & Bamenda: Spears Media Press, pp. 1–20.
- Orisadare, M. A. (2021). Women’s political representation and institutionalism in Nigeria – historical perspective. In: Madsen, D. H. (ed.) *Gendered institutions and women’s political representation in Africa*. London: Zed Books Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755637829.ch-007>



## Chapter Two

- Ortiz, E., Allen, J., Nagel, R. U. & Smith, J. M. (2023). *Exploring the Links Between Women's Status and Democracy*. Research Brief, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security (GIWPS). Available at: <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Exploring-the-Links-between-Womens-Status-and-Democracy.pdf>.
- Osaghae, E. E. (1999). Democratization in sub-Saharan Africa: Faltering prospects, new hopes. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 17(1), 5–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02589009908729636>
- Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC). (2023). *Worrying numbers for women in 10th NASS*. PLAC, 18 May 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://placng.org/Legist/worrying-numbers-for-women-in-10th-nass/> [Accessed: 28 September 2024].
- Ramtohul, R. (2021). Women, gender, and politics in Africa. In: Yacob-Haliso, O. & Falola, T. (eds.) *The Palgrave handbook of African women's studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4\\_132](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-28099-4_132)
- Randall, V. (2011). *Gender and Democracy: Briefing Chapter*, IDCR–BP–08/11. Institute for Democracy & Conflict Resolution.
- Rodríguez Gustá, A. L. & Madera, N. (2017). Organisational repertoires for advancing women's rights: An analysis of structures, groups and policies in national legislatures in Latin America and the Caribbean. In: Došek, T., Freidenberg, F., Caminotti, M. & Muñoz-Pogossian, B. (eds.) *Women, politics and democracy in Latin America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95009-6\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95009-6_6)
- The Sun. (2016). *Buhari replies wife: You belong in my kitchen, bedroom*. The Sun, 15 October 2016. [Online]. Available at: <http://sunnewsonline.com/buhari-replies-wife-you-belong-in-my-kitchen-bedroom/> [Accessed: 18 May 2020].
- Vanguard. (2018). *Aisha Buhari sets Twitter abuzz, re-tweets videos of Bruce, Misau criticising FG*. Vanguard, 19 January 2018. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/01/aisha-buhari-sets-twitter-abuzz-re-tweets-videos-of-bruce-misau-criticising-fg> [Accessed: 18 May 2020].

- Wambui, J. (2016). Neo-patrimonialism, patriarchy and politics of women's representation in Kenya. In: Kabira, W. M. (ed.) *The walls we can't see: Public policy lethargy on women's political participation in Kenya*. Heinrich Böll Stiftung – East & Horn of Africa.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2018). *Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/millennium-development-goals-\(mdgs\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/millennium-development-goals-(mdgs))
- Yetunde, G.A. (2003). Nigerian women in politics: A chapter of the role of women in President Obasanjo's administration: 1999–2003. In: Falola, T. et al. (eds.) *African Women and Cultural Affairs*. Lagos: Dalton Press.



## Chapter Three

# Parliamentary Female Representation and Party Candidate Selection Methods in Zambia

**Biggie Joe Ndambwa** 

*Department of Government and Management Studies  
University of Zambia   
Lusaka – Zambia  
joe.ndambwa@unza.zm*

**Aaron Wiza Siwale** 

*Department of Government and Management Studies  
University of Zambia   
aaron.siwale@unza.zm*

### Introduction

On 12 August 2021, Zambia held general elections, which marked a significant turning point in her political trajectory. Long-time opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema of the United Party for National Development (UPND) was elected President of the Republic of Zambia, resoundingly defeating incumbent Edgar Chagwa Lungu of the Patriotic Front (PF) Party. Other notable political parties, such as the Socialist Party (SP), led by Fred M'membe, and the Democratic Party, headed by former foreign minister Harry Kalaba, scored less than 1% at the presidential level. While this election put an end to a decade-long rule of the Patriotic Front Party, official results from the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ, 2021a) show that it was also the first time that the UPND entered parliament with 46.28% of seats in the National Assembly of Zambia from 41.66% of the seats in 2016, while the Patriotic Front party won 36.66%

of the seats, compared to 42.01% in 2016 general elections (ECZ, 2021a).

Another significant outcome of the elections was that it witnessed a reduced number of women into the Zambian parliament. According to official results released by the ECZ, 23 women were elected out of the 156-seat Zambian parliament, constituting 14.6% of total parliamentarians, down from 18.4% in the previous parliament. On the one hand, women from UPND now make up one-third of the total female legislators, despite the fact that UPND won the majority with 46.28% of parliamentary seats. On the other, women from the Patriotic Front Party make up of one-third of the total female legislators in the Zambian parliament (National Assembly of Zambia, 2022). We agree with other experts (Maguire, 2018; Krook & Zetterberg, 2014), who argue that when such figures are not so inspiring, especially that political parties usually campaign on a gender equality platform, its gender parity measures to ensure women's fair and improved representation in legislative bodies become doubtful.

As noted by the European Union Election Observer Mission (EUOM, 2022) in its 2021 Elections Report for Zambia, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022) and others (DiRienzo & Das, 2019; Fokum et al., 2020; Tajali, 2019; Agénor & Canuto, 2015), the participation of women in decision-making in parliament is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy, but a necessary pre-condition for women's interests to be considered for policy and legislative consequences. This means that political structures or methods used by parties and governments, which do not result in the equal participation of men and women or their equal enjoyment of benefits from state interventions are, by definition, neither inclusive nor democratic. In recognising that over three decades since the reintroduction of plural politics in Zambia, women's gains in the political arena have been slow and inadequate, it is, therefore, significant to make scholarly inquiry that makes women's participation in public affairs a priority and devise a strategy that would scale-up each of the political parties' efforts to foster gender equality.

In terms of methodology, as noted in the overture to this chapter, our goal is to provide evidence for the argument that an enhanced role of the party's central organ in the selection process is cardinal if more women are to be selected for parliamentary elections. For the purposes of electoral administration, Zambia is divided into 10 administrative provinces; the provinces are then sub-divided into 116 districts. The districts are further divided into electoral constituencies according to the Zambia Statistics Agency (ZamStats, 2022). Each constituency is represented by one Member of Parliament. The smallest electoral unit is called the ward; the grassroots' administrative structure. Following this structure, political parties also have structures with officials corresponding to the official electoral administrative structure. Using several sources of data, such as party adoption lists and interviews, we managed to collect the information required for this from the respective party administrative structures. We analysed the adoption lists for the three political parties (PF, UPND and SP) in all 10 provinces of Zambia. Without a doubt, the 2021 general elections in Zambia were, by and large, dominated by the UPND and the Patriotic Front Party, as evidenced by the number of seats won by each party in the country's legislative body.

We also take a keen interest in the Socialist Party's performance in the election, especially the number of parliamentary candidates selected on its ticket – 137 in total out of 156 – something unprecedented in recent Zambian political history. Although the performance of the Socialist Party at the parliamentary and presidential levels was dismal, it provides a blueprint for the chapter of a centralised candidate selection system. The information obtained from parties' candidate adoption lists was used to determine which candidate selection system – centralised, decentralised or hybrid – was most effective in selecting more women as parliamentary candidates in the 2021 general elections (ECZ, 2021b).

We augmented this information by conducting at least one in-depth interview with grassroots or wards, district, provincial and national party officials in some selected provinces and districts. The interviews comprised a series of open-ended

questions asking respondents about their experiences with adoption and nominations of parliamentary candidates in the run-up to the 2021 general elections. The exact number of national, provincial, district, constituency and ward level officials that we interviewed is as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Provincial, Districts, Constituencies and Ward Participants

| Province     | District(s)             | Constituencies                    | Wards                                                                                                     | Participants |
|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Lusaka       | Lusaka<br>Chilanga      | Chilanga<br>Chawama<br>Matero     | Chinyanja,<br>New Farms,<br>Nakachenje<br>Misisi, Kuku,<br>John Howard<br>George,<br>Mandevu,<br>Lilanda  | 10           |
| Central      | Itezhi-Tezhi*<br>Mumbwa | Itezhi-Tezhi<br>Mumbwa<br>Nangoma | Basanga,<br>Nansenga<br>(Makunku),<br>Banamwaze<br>Mupona,<br>Mumba,<br>Nalusanga<br>Keezwa,<br>Nalubanda | 10           |
| Muchinga     | Shiwang'andu<br>Nakonde | Shiwang'andu<br>Nakonde           | Bulaya,<br>Chibesakunda,<br>Matumbo<br>Ilonda, Isunda,<br>Mpande                                          | 10           |
| Luapula      | Mansa<br>Kawambwa       | Mansa<br>Pambashe                 | Mulelenshi,<br>Muchinka,<br>Muleshi<br>Ilombe,<br>Pambashe,<br>Kabanse                                    | 10           |
| <b>Total</b> |                         |                                   |                                                                                                           | <b>40</b>    |

*Source: Authors' conceptualisation*

Itezhi-Tezhi District was previously part of Central Province until October 2021, when the new administration realigned it

to Southern Province. In 2011, late President Micheal Sata had allocated it to Central Province.

Thus, the original data we collected has the advantage of including qualitative data into the statistics that we collected from the adoption list from selected political parties under investigation. However, the in-depth interviews had limited geographical coverage. This limitation was abated by including, urban, peri-urban and rural constituencies that were representative of Zambia's electoral geography.

This chapter makes a contribution to the discourse on female representation by arguing that parties' candidate selection methods have a significant bearing on the number of women nominated or selected for elections. Academic inquiry in this genre has often focused on gender quotas (O'Brien & Piscopo, 2019; Rosen, 2017; Preece et al., 2016; Reingold & Harrell, 2010) often deals with increased gender quotas as of the basic principles for the efficacy of political parties in effecting gender representation. While the use of gender quotas by political parties improved the status of women in some legislative bodies, we argue that very little can be achieved in countries without legally binding quotas for women. In countries without quotas for women, we have to rely on another mechanism – the candidate selection process. In this chapter, we therefore attempt to provide an answer to the question of what selection methods do Zambian political parties use and how do they impact selection of women and participation of women in politics? The following section answers these questions and forms the analytical framework of our chapter.

### **Political Parties as Gatekeepers, Women and Candidate Selection**

Political parties play a critical role in the recruitment of women as parliamentary candidates by virtue of being primary gatekeepers in candidate selection processes. According to Kayuni and Chikadza (2016), who studied the supply-side of women's political participation, argue that although there are some of the factors that explain why women decide to run

(or not) for political office, gatekeepers within the parties, that is the people with power within a party, can determine, for the most part, women's entry into politics. Other scholars (Mirziyoyeva & Salahodjaev, 2022; Preece, et al., 2016) point out that the gatekeeping row of political parties makes it possible for parties to effect change by recruiting more women to stand on their tickets during elections and become strategic mediums for female representation in legislative bodies.

As gatekeepers, political parties are critical players in the socialisation, recruitment, selection, nomination, and election of candidates to public office (Celis & Erzeel, 2017; Childs et al., 2010). By so doing, they expose female candidates, and other citizens, to politics by conveying the principles of democratic procedure (Siwale & Momba, 2020). The importance of the political parties in candidate selection is rooted in the fact that access to political power and decision-making typically begins at the political party level within political parties (Kayuni & Chikadza, 2016). Since the reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1991, the expectations have become even higher, where contesting parties represent multiple avenues for participation and representation of the hitherto marginalised segments of society, including, but not limited to, women. Despite Zambia's return to a multiparty democracy in the early 1990s, the political parties are still largely a masculine domain, with only a small minority of women represented (EUOM, 2022). For instance, there are currently only 13.4% of women in the local councils elected according to official results by the country's electoral body (ECZ, 2021b).

Like most African countries, Zambia has a long history of male domination in politics. Studies (Ikegbu, 2018; Culhane, 2018; Abbo, 2012) suggest that men usually enjoy privileged access to the necessary material and political resources, even in traditionally matrimonial communities. In addition, data released by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2017) indicates that male domination in African politics means that fewer women have been able to reach positions of decision-making within the political parties, and that women are nominated by the major parties in fewer numbers than men. In order to



improve the number of women in politics, some institutions such as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA, 2005) and scholars (Celis et al., 2014) suggest that the use of gender quotas which stipulate that the number or percentage of women must be included in a candidate list or the number of seats to be allocated to women in a legislature. The main aim of these gender quotas is to reverse discrimination in law and practice and to provide equal opportunities for women and men in politics.

Those who support the implementation of gender quotas, such as Krook and Norris (2014) and Larserud and Taphorn (2007), argue that such mechanisms regulate political parties' actions and emphasise the notion of political parties as the 'gatekeepers' through which citizens pursue opportunities for political recruitment into the country's leadership. Gender quotas play a critical role in providing meaningful and effective opportunities for female party members to access elected public offices. In many countries, electoral gender quotas have proved to be the single most effective tool for 'fast-tracking' women's representation in legislative bodies.

Krook and Norris (2014) suggest the implementation of one or a combination of all three forms of gender quotas – legislated, legislated reserve seats, and voluntary party quotas for women – is cardinal to achieving effective female representation. Legislated quotas are those which regulate the gender composition of the candidate lists and are binding by law for all political parties in the election; they are mandated either through national constitutions or by electoral legislation. Over 60 countries and special areas around the world use legislated candidate quotas, which may be used in conjunction with other types of electoral gender quotas. Under Zambian electoral law (Electoral Process Act, Number 16 of 2016 and the Constitution of Zambia, Amendment Act Number 2 of 2016), political parties are not bound to effect any form of quota for women during candidate selection processes, although the constitution clearly states that political parties should be gender sensitive in their policies and outlook but does not stipulate whether parties should reserve special seats for women.

The only type of mechanism applicable to Zambian political parties is voluntary party quotas for women. According to Krook and Norris (2014), these are quotas adopted by individual political parties for their own candidate lists and are usually enshrined in party statutes and rules. In about 37 countries and territorial jurisdictions, at least one political party represented in the legislative body uses a voluntary party quota. However, it is important to note that as an extensive body of research in this genre suggests, such quotas may have a differential impact in different contexts and in different electoral systems and may take longer than a single electoral cycle to produce the desired impact (Celis et al., 2014). Furthermore, we believe, as noted by other scholars (Langston & Aparicio-Castillo, 2011; Chaney, 2014), that gender quotas do not remove all structural, institutional and societal barriers for women in politics and need to be complemented by other measures designed to create equal opportunities for women in politics. This brings us to the question of the selection procedure or method used by respective political parties because the method of selecting candidates matters whether quotas exist in a political jurisdiction or not.

Regarding methods or procedures for candidate selection, political parties in Zambia use three methods for candidate selection. The first method of candidate selection is the *decentralised system*, where ordinary members at the local level – control the process by pre-selecting candidates during party primaries and recommend candidates to the next tier in the party hierarchy, usually a regional or provincial committee which further shortlists candidates and submit to the national level agency. The national level agency makes the final decision by endorsing the decisions of the lower organs for adoption. According to Hazan and Rahat (2002b), in extremely decentralised systems, the ordinary members of the party decide without any participation or involvement of the party leaders. In this chapter, this scenario is illustrated by the manner that the UPND selected its candidates in most constituencies, where members of constituency and district electoral college elected the party candidates through direct votes. The election for

adoption is between all candidates that present themselves, and the process takes place under the supervision of local party officials – largely outside the control of the party's National Management Committee (NMC). According to one party official, the NMC ensures that the person who won the primary election will be on the ballot chapter representing the party (Interview with UPND member, 2 June 2022).

The second type of candidate selection is a *centralised system*; that is, where the top national level agencies control the candidate selection and recommend them to the regional and grassroots members (Hazan & Rahat, 2002b). As noted by others (Krook & Norris, 2014; Hazan & Rahat, 2002a; Farrell, 1994) in a centralised candidate selection system, a national party agency would decide on the candidate selection without any involvement by the more local branches of the party. However, the actual practice for candidate selection even in centralised parties is usually somewhere between the two extremes. In some centralised parties, candidates are chosen at the local level but the national level of the party has enough degree of influence on who is selected for a particular electoral district or constituency (Krook & Norris, 2014). In this way, the influence of the national level agency is to be proactive by encouraging, recommending, or forcing the local branch to choose a particular candidate – or negative by the national level party reserving the right to veto candidates. In this case, the centralised party often tries to strike a difficult balance between national level strategies and preferences of party officials and local sensitivities. This scenario seems to have been the system used by the Socialist Party to select its candidates prior to the August 2021 general elections in Zambia. This is not strange for a party that espouses the principle of democratic centralism.

We also had to look at the former governing party, the Patriotic Front Party, which employed a mixture of centralised and decentralised system. We have called this the *Hybrid System*, where local, regional or national – controls the candidate selection based on party interest and local realities. According to Krook and Norris (2014), in extreme cases, where the party central organ decides to be highly involved, a national party

agency would decide on the candidate selection without any involvement by the local branches of the party. At the other end of the scale would be a system where the most local branches of the party would decide on candidates with little participation from the national level agency. In most Zambian political parties, candidates are chosen at the local level even though the national level of the party has a varying degree of influence. As witnessed in the 2021 general elections, the Patriotic Front Party, which used a hybrid system often had a pro-active influence on the process by encouraging, recommending, or forcing the local branch to choose a particular candidate – or negative by the national level party reserving the right to veto candidates.

Although there is little evidence that any of these methods were decisive in selecting women in safe seats, it would be natural for all the political parties selected in this chapter to be more influential in fulfilling electoral gender quotas than participation which tend to favour decentralised candidate selection method (Field & Siavelis, 2008). While the decentralised system encourages democratic participation, it has serious implications as far as women's capacity to sustain electoral campaigns during primaries. Like in most electoral primaries, there is enough evidence that so many disadvantages, such as electoral malpractices, which disadvantage female candidates during the adoption process. On the one hand, a decentralised candidate selection system lowers the chances of women being selected because of structural and socio-economic reasons at the grassroots level. On the other hand, a centralised system allows the party's national-level agency to determine its course by affirmative action, which is selecting more women. We think that there should be evidence suggesting this could have been the reason for the lower number of women in the Zambian parliament after the 2021 general elections.

In the analysis and discussion that follows in the next sections, we offer a combination of quantitative data from the party candidate list described above and qualitative analysis and discussion of interview information from party officials and candidates as well as information from other written

sources. We analysed data from the 2021 Zambian elections that covered the calendar, selection criteria and structural characteristics of candidate nomination in the political parties under investigation. Further, the chapter examines the challenges faced by the women during the adoption process, campaigning after adoption as well as after winning for those who emerge victorious.

### **Results for Decentralised, Hybrid and Centralised Adoption System**

This section highlights evidence in support of the argument that centralised method of selecting candidates is most effective if a political party wants to achieve gender parity.

Table 2 shows that the centralised method of selecting candidates is most effective if a political party would like to maximise the number of women. In the run-up to the 2021 general elections, 41% of the candidates nominated by the Socialist Party were female. The Socialist Party also had the highest number selected per province, except in Lusaka with only 8% female candidates compared to 24% and 32% for the UPND and the Patriotic Front party respectively. The rest were all above 30% minimum, albeit contesting for the first time in general elections, presented quite an interesting result to the election process. Unlike many new entrant political parties, the Socialist Party managed to field 137 candidates out of the 156 parliamentary seats. Of the 137 candidates, 59 were female candidates, representing 41% of women adopted by the party (ECZ, 2021b).

According to Socialist Party statutes, contained in its constitution, the selection of candidates is supposed to be driven by the party structures from below where the majority of party members specifically within their electoral boundaries can participate directly in the selection of candidates to represent their constituencies. Thereafter, the central committee of the Socialist Party presides over the top four candidates in choosing the final candidate to represent the party. While the party constitution commits itself to ensuring the equal participation

in the party regardless of race, gender, tribe or colour, the party does not have a quota system for adopting candidates to balancing gender representation in the party (Interview with Secretary General of Socialist Party, 5 June 2022). It is the party's national level agency which takes precedence in all matters of policy, including candidate selection.

**Table 2:** Percentage and Method of Candidate Selection by Gender in 10 Provinces of Zambia in 2021

|                   | UPND –<br>Decentralised<br>System |              | Patriotic Front<br>Party– Hybrid<br>System |              | Socialist Party –<br>Centralised<br>Method |              |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Province          | Men<br>(%)                        | Women<br>(%) | Men<br>(%)                                 | Women<br>(%) | Men<br>(%)                                 | Women<br>(%) |
| Central           | 80                                | 20           | 88                                         | 12           | 68                                         | 32           |
| Copperbelt        | 100                               | 00           | 77                                         | 23           | 55                                         | 45           |
| Eastern           | 83                                | 17           | 60                                         | 40           | 46                                         | 54           |
| Luapula           | 94                                | 06           | 88                                         | 12           | 66                                         | 34           |
| Lusaka            | 76                                | 24           | 68                                         | 32           | 92                                         | 08           |
| Muchinga          | 90                                | 10           | 80                                         | 20           | 40                                         | 60           |
| Northern          | 100                               | 00           | 92                                         | 08           | 38                                         | 62           |
| North-<br>Western | 92                                | 08           | 92                                         | 08           | 66                                         | 34           |
| Southern          | 88                                | 12           | 88                                         | 12           | 56                                         | 44           |
| Western           | 89                                | 11           | 79                                         | 21           | 68                                         | 32           |
| <b>Ave. %</b>     | <b>87.2</b>                       | <b>10.8</b>  | <b>81.2</b>                                | <b>18.8</b>  | <b>59</b>                                  | <b>41</b>    |

**Source:** Authors' compilation based on Electoral Commission of Zambia validly adopted candidates.

The selection criteria in the Socialist Party, however, shows that more women are more interested in contesting in the party structures as leaders, especially in agrarian provinces, such as Eastern and Southern provinces as shown in Figure 1.

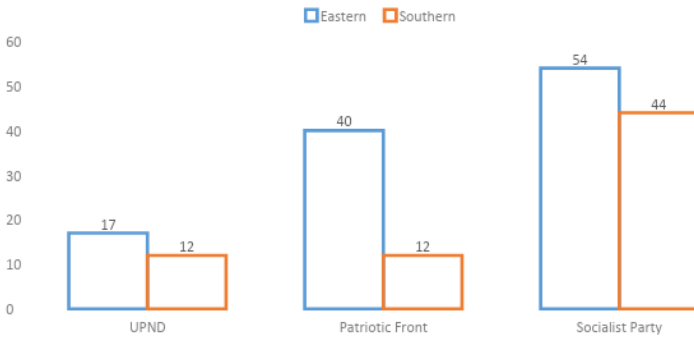


**Figure 1:** Percentage of Female Candidates by Party in Agrarian Provinces. Source: Authors' compilation

It can also be seen that the Socialist Party had the greatest number of women candidates in the parliamentary elections with 59 female candidates out of 156 seats representing 40% of female candidates from one party. This is consistent with our argument that a party that has centralised the adoption process tends to be responsive to the gender and control for a balanced gender representation in national elections. As a result of the nature of adoption process in the Socialist Party, most respondents could not explicitly state the challenges that they faced in the adoption process as it was the first time that the party was fielding candidates in a general election and most contestants knew each other during campaigns.

The UPND had the lowest number of female candidates, which is represented by only 10.8% of its candidates. Only 20 out of 156 parliamentary seats were won by women candidates, representing 13% of the total parliamentary seats (ECZ, 2021a). This is way below the target that the country has set to equalise the gender gap in political participation and the decision-making process. Zambia is a signatory to the Southern Africa Development Community Protocol on Gender and Development which requires 50% women's representation in all areas of decision-making by the year 2030 (SADC, 2008). This means that the decentralised candidate selection method may not be the best method as far as political participation of women is concerned, despite the party having an arrangement where

at each party level there is respective representation of each gender. For instance, at district level, there is a party chairman as well as women chairladies (Interview with UPND member, Chilanga District, 18 May 2022). However, much as women have been given some of those positions, they are somewhat nominal, as most influential positions are occupied by men, and women only perform women-related functions. For instance, all the ten provincial structures are headed by men (Interview with UPND member, Lusaka Province, 10 April 2022).

While women are given positions to perform certain functions that lean towards representing women affairs within the party, there is limited participation of women as candidates in national elections. In 2021, UPND only fielded 16 female candidates out of the 156 constituencies, representing 10% of women candidates from the party. The main reason for the lower women participation in elections rests in the adoption method as explained in the above section. The party followed a decentralised approach where all party members without regard to structural imbalances that disadvantages women to compete with their male counterparts on a free and fair level. The party was aware that it has traditional strongholds where it enjoys over 90% support. These are areas where the party could have exercised due consideration to challenges that women face when paired with male counterparts in political competition. For instance, in Southern province, where the party holds all 20 of the parliamentary seats and was guaranteed of retaining them, the party only adopted two female candidates to represent the party in parliamentary elections in 2021.

The adopted female candidates from the UPND did raise concerns regarding how hard it was for them to finally be accepted on the party ticket as candidates. The perception that society has on women in politics that they engage in promiscuous relationships with the party leaders in order to win acceptance in the party creates an environment that makes it difficult for women to come into the open and freely declare interest to compete in national politics (Interview with UPND member, Mumbwa District, 13 May 2022). Further, economically, Zambian society has for a long time favoured



men which better advantages in an environment where there is a strong political culture of expecting gifts from political candidates such as party regalia, alcoholic beverages, and to a greater extent, money, in exchange for political support, and therefore, women tend to fail to mobilise supporters and fairly participate in political contests (Interview with UPND member, Shiwang'andu District, March 2022).

Since the main drawback is the economy, it is shocking that even in Copperbelt, where the Socialist Party and Patriotic Front had few female candidates, the UPND female candidates failed to win any primary elections. In Lusaka, only 2 female candidates out of 12 managed to win primary elections.

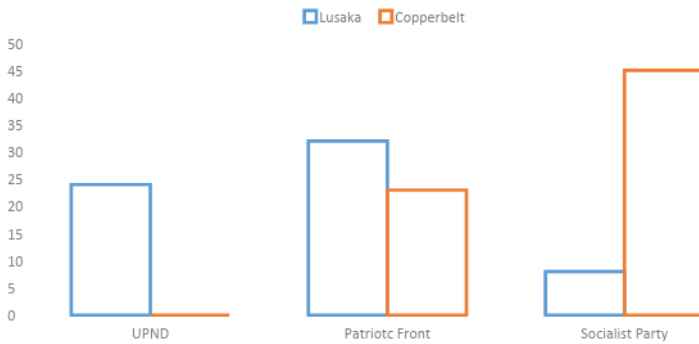


**Figure 2:** Percentage of Female Candidates in Copperbelt and Lusaka. Source: Authors' compilation

This means that even where modern economic livelihood matters most, there are structural challenges that prevent women from competing favourably with male counterparts. Hence, we argue that the decentralised system may not be ideal for parties that would like to select more women as parliamentary candidates.

Regarding the hybrid method used by the former governing party, only 18.9% of candidates nominated by the Patriotic Front were female. The Patriotic Front fielded candidates in all the constituencies. Out of the 156 constituencies, the party adopted 25 women as candidates for

parliamentary elections, representing 18% of female candidates for parliamentary elections. One striking observation is that in the adoption process, the party secretariat had a greater role in selecting who finally contests on the party ticket (Interview with Patriotic Front member, Nakonde District, May 2022). The adoption method as explained above started with recommendations from constituency structures on the available candidates and their strengths and weaknesses (Interview with Patriotic Front member, Mumbwa District, 28 January 2022). The Secretariat had to scrutinise the candidates based on the information provided by lower structures and ultimately, the final list of candidates reflected that the party settled for more male candidates even if the number of aspiring women candidates was far below that of aspiring candidates (Interview with Patriotic Front member, Lusaka, 28 May 2022).

It is very clear from the analysis and discussion in this section that much needs to be achieved to increase the number of female candidates for parliamentary elections. Since Zambia has not yet made legislation for mandatory gender quotas, it may be plausible for political parties that need to maximise the number of women, by using a centralised system for candidate selection. Of course, there is a need to take into consideration structural barriers to female adoption. We turn to this subject in the next section.

### **Structural Barriers to Female Adoption**

Although there are commitments by political parties in their manifestoes and constitutions, national policies as well as international regimes and agreements to which Zambia subscribes, reality shows that the country is far from reaching any target set by respective political parties as well as the nation at large. The fact that political parties are free to craft their own constitutions which have not embraced a gender quota system, in order to provide a base on which a substantial number of women could aspire to compete with their male counterparts, creates a big gap to balance women's representation in parliament.

Most primaries are marred with corruption and abuse of the electoral process by party officials (Ndambwa, 2020). Although this form of malpractice is not often noticed, it does not just undermine the integrity of the entire electoral process but also discourages and disadvantages women from contesting as candidates. For instance, one respondent who was adopted for a seat in a rural constituency and later the party replaced her with a male candidate, recounted how difficult it was for her to just express interest in contesting for a parliamentary seat where the incumbent was a man and was willing to recontest the seat. She said that “a number of social media groups were created to de-campaign me where a lot of hate speech was advanced towards me. Although I won at the district level and the national level approved my adoption, within a week I was replaced by a male counterpart by the secretary general of the party” (Interview with 2021 parliamentary aspiring candidate, 29 December 2021). What this entails is that political participation by women in the realm of political competition is dependent on a number of factors, chief amongst them enough resources and the dominance of men in these political parties which tend to present a gender-skewed approach when making important decisions in the party, such as selecting candidates (Wang & Muriaas, 2019; Rosen, 2017; Ndambwa, 2015).

Furthermore, the ownership of political parties determines who holds what position and eventually is adopted on the party ticket as a candidate. In Zambia, political parties are mostly founded and funded by men (Siwale & Momba, 2020). In most cases, the founder remains the engine of the party and life president. For that matter, they cannot be challenged for as long as they are willing to maintain their position. It is this ‘big man’ syndrome that gives almost exclusive powers to the party founders to almost hand-pick friends as candidates on their ticket (Siwale, 2016). The majority of their friends are not women. As a result, women tend to lag in competing for parliamentary seats with their male counterparts who actually own the political parties.

Another aspect affecting women’s participation in politics as well as the adoption process is political culture. Today,

Zambia's political culture posits somewhat signs of upward mobility from parochial to a civic political culture. There is still a firm narrative that leadership is a preserve of the men, especially in rural areas and religious families. Therefore, socialisation processes tend to tilt towards the dominant norms in Zambian society that men should lead and eventually it affects the desire of women to aspire for political leadership as well as men's openness to work with women. As much as there are a number of policy initiatives and international regimes to which the country subscribes to reduce the gender gap in politics, political parties remain male-dominated and to a greater extent male-dominated decisions made by political parties and parliament (Rosen, 2017; Bjarnegård, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

The chapter endeavoured to explore the nature of female representation in the Zambian Parliament in relation to the adoption methods employed by various political parties in the country. Three political parties, namely, the UPND, Patriotic Front and Socialist Party, were used as chapter cases and showed that the political parties employed three different methods in the name of centralised, decentralised and hybrid adoption methods. The chapter revealed that the Socialist Party, which used a centralised method of adopting candidates, had adopted more female candidates than the party that used decentralised and hybrid methods put together in the 2021 parliamentary elections.

To explain why women are under-represented in parliament in Zambia, the adoption method stands out as one of the primary reasons why women fail to make it onto the ballot as candidates. Several candidates interviewed revealed that to become adopted in their respective communities, there are issues that they need to attend to; chief amongst such as providing money, party regalia, food and other gifts to mobilise support, which the party uses as benchmarks to measure the popularity of the candidate. However, many women in the country are economically disadvantaged in most households in Zambia, as they depend on working men to fend for them. This

eventually discourages political parties from adopting women who are not able to sponsor themselves as well as helping the party to campaign. Women find it hard to penetrate parliament because of the electoral system that tends to support a two-party system which equally banks on traditional strongholds. From the adoptions of the two major parties in the 2021 parliamentary elections, we note that the dominant parties adopted few female candidates and placed them in constituencies that were not their strongholds, when in fact they had safe seats which could have been allocated to women.

Further, the chapter revealed that ownership of political parties in most cases determined the nature of party adoptions whether the party has a written constitution stipulating how adoptions and other decisions should be made. It must be stressed that political parties are formed and owned by men. The owners of the parties are usually the main funders of the parties, with the help from a few of their friends. These tend to be the key decision-makers, and they mostly settle for economically well-off male candidates to stand on their tickets knowing that the party will not spend much on the campaigns of such candidates. This has resulted in the marginalisation of a number of women from actively participating in politics. In the absence of legislation that would help to facilitate the establishment of adoption quotas amongst political parties, we believe that centralised methods would compel party leaders to at least adopt enough women for parliamentary elections.

## **Acknowledgements**

We wish to sincerely thank the leadership of the three political parties (UPND, PF and SP) for the assistance rendered to us with their respective adoption lists that were provided in a very timely manner. Our gratitude also goes to the respondents who agreed to be interviewed despite their busy schedules.

## References

- Abbo, B. M. (2012). *Implementing Nigeria's nomadic education programme (NEP)*. [Online]. Available at: <https://dlci-hoa.org/assets/upload/combined-documents/20200804030611105.pdf>
- Agénor, P. R. & Canuto, O. (2015). Gender equality and economic growth in Brazil: A long-run analysis. *Journal of Macroeconomics*, 43(2015), 155–172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmacro.2014.10.004>
- Ashiabbor, S. (2008) Political parties and democracy in theoretical and practical perspectives: Selecting candidates for legislative office. *Washington, DC: National Democratic Institute*.
- Bjarnegård, E. (2013). *Gender, informal institutions and political recruitment: Explaining male dominance in parliamentary representation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137296740>
- Bjarnegård, E. & Zetterberg, P. (2019). Political parties, formal selection criteria, and gendered parliamentary representation. *Party Politics*, 25(3), 325–335. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068817715552>
- Celis, K. & Erzeel, S. (2017). The complementarity advantage: Parties, representativeness and newcomers' access to power. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 70(1), 43–61. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsv043>
- Celis, K., Erzeel, S., Mügge, L. & Damstra, A. (2014). Quotas and intersectionality: Ethnicity and gender in candidate selection. *International Political Science Review*, 35(1), 41–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512113507733>
- Chaney, P. (2014). The substantive representation of women—Does issue-salience matter? Party politicisation and UK Westminster elections 1945–2010. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 16(1), 96–116. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-856X.12007>
- Childs, S., Webb, P. & Marthaler, S. (2010). Constituting and substantively representing women: Applying new approaches to a UK case chapter. *Politics & Gender*, 6(2), 199–223. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X10000048>

### Chapter Three

- Culhane, L. E. (2018). *Male dominance in political recruitment: Gender, power, and institutions in the Republic of Ireland*. University of Manchester.
- DiRienzo, C. E. & Das, J. (2019). Women in government, environment, and corruption. *Environmental Development*, 30(3), 103–113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envdev.2019.04.006>
- Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ). (2021a). *Council Chairperson and Mayoral Election Results*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.elections.org.zm/2021-general-election-results-and-statistics/>
- Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ). (2021b). *Registered Voters by Gender*. ECZ. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.elections.org.zm/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/REGISTERED-VOTERS-BY-GENDER-AND-CONSTITUENCY.pdf>
- European Union Election Observer Mission(EUOM). (2022). *Zambia 2021 Final Report*. EUOM. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eom-zambia-2021/eu-eom-zambia-2021-final-report\\_en?s=4273](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eom-zambia-2021/eu-eom-zambia-2021-final-report_en?s=4273)
- Farrell, D. M. (1994). Ireland: Centralisation, professionalisation and competitive pressures. In: Katz, R. S. & Mair, P. (eds.) *How parties organise: Change and adaptation in party organisations in Western democracies*. London: Sage, pp. 216–241. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446250570.n9>
- Field, B. N. & Siavelis, P. M. (2008). Candidate selection procedures in transitional polities: A research note. *Party Politics*, 14(5), 620–639. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068808093393>
- Field, B. N. & Siavelis, P. M. (2011). Endogenising legislative candidate selection procedures in nascent democracies: evidence from Spain and Chile. *Democratisation*, 18(3), 797–822. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2011.563120>
- Fokum, V. Y., Fonjong, L. N. & Adams, M. J. (2020). Increasing women's representation in the Cameroon parliament: Do numbers really matter? *Women's Studies International Forum*, 80(2020), 102369. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2020.102369>

- Hazan, R. & Rahat, G. (2002b). *The Impact of Candidate Selection Methods on Legislative Politics: Theoretical Propositions and Preliminary Findings*. Presented at the European Consortium for Political Research's 30th Joint Session of Workshops, University of Turin, Italy.
- Hazan, R. Y. & Rahat, G. (2002a). *The political consequences of candidate selection for parties, parliaments and governance*. Presented at the International Conference on Political Parties, Parliamentary Committees, Parliamentary Leadership and Governance, Research Committee of Legislative Specialists, International Political Science Association, Bilgi University, Istanbul, Turkey.
- Ikegbu, E. A. (2018). *Traditional African Male Dominance in Leadership, Cologenderism: The Need for Gender Balancing*. Proceedings of the International Conference on Gender Research, April, pp. 197–205. Reading: Academic Conferences International Limited.
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). (2005). *Annual Report*. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/reference\\_docs/Annual-Report-2005-PDF.pdf](https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/reference_docs/Annual-Report-2005-PDF.pdf) [Accessed: 15 October 2024].
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). (2017). *Women in National Parliaments: Situation as of 1st January 2017*. IPU. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>
- Katongo, C. N. (2017). *Female political representation in Zambia: a chapter of four political parties' policies and perspectives on party gender quotas and reserved seats adoption*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Zambia.
- Kayuni, H. M. & Chikadza, K. F. (2016). *The gatekeepers: Political participation of women in Malawi*. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI Brief 12).
- Krook, M. L. & Norris, P. (2014). Beyond quotas: Strategies to promote gender equality in elected office. *Political Studies*, 62(1), 2–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12116>
- Krook, M. L. & Zetterberg, P. (2014). Electoral quotas and political representation: Comparative perspectives. *International Political Science Review*, 35(1), 3–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512113508422>



### Chapter Three

- Langston, J. & Aparicio, F. J. (2016). *Gender quotas are not enough: How background experience and campaigning affect electoral outcomes*. Research project funded by the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres, Mexico.
- Larserud, S. & Taphorn, R. (2007). Designing for equality: Women's quotas and women's political participation. *Development*, 50(1), 36–42. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.development.1100333>
- Maguire, S. (2018). *Barriers to women entering parliament and local government*. Institute for Policy Research Report. University of Bath. UK.
- Mirziyoyeva, Z. & Salahodjaev, R. (2022). Women's parliamentary representation and sustainable development goals: a cross-country evidence. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, 17(2022), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-021-09940-8>
- Murray, R. (2015). What makes a good politician? Reassessing the criteria used for political recruitment. *Politics & Gender*, 11(4), 770–776. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X15000513>
- Ndambwa, B. J. (2015). *Institutionalisation of legislative leadership in the National Assembly of Zambia, 1964–2011*. Master's dissertation. Available at: <http://dspace.unza.zm/handle/123456789/4080>
- Ndambwa, B. J. (2020). Electoral integrity and democratic consolidation. In: Banda, T., Kaaba, O., Hinfelaar, M. & Ndulo, M. (eds.) *Democracy and electoral politics in Zambia*, pp. 149–171. Leiden: Brill. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004430440\\_008](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004430440_008)
- O'Brien, D. Z. & Piscopo, J. M. (2019). The impact of women in parliament. In: Franceschet, S. Krook, M. L. & Tan, N. (eds.) *The Palgrave handbook of women's political rights*, pp 53–72. London: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59074-9\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59074-9_4)
- Obbo, C. (1976). Dominant male ideology and female options: Three East African case studies. *Africa*, 46(4), 371–389. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1159300>
- Preece, J. R., Stoddard, O. B. & Fisher, R. (2016). Run, Jane, run! Gendered responses to political party recruitment. *Political Behavior*, 38(2016), 561–577. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-015-9327-3>

- Rahat, G. (2007). Candidate selection: The choice before the choice. *J. Democracy*, 18(157). <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2007.0014>
- Reingold, B. & Harrell, J. (2010). The impact of descriptive representation on women's political engagement: Does party matter? *Political Research Quarterly*, 63(2), 280–294.
- Rosen, J. (2017). Gender quotas for women in national politics: A comparative analysis across development thresholds. *Social Science Research*, 66(2017), 82–101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2017.01.008>
- Siwale, A. W. (2016). *The Survival of Political Parties in Consolidating Democracies: A Qualitative Case Chapter of Zambian Political Parties 1991–2015*. Master's thesis: University of Gothenburg. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004430440\\_010](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004430440_010)
- Siwale, A. W. & Momba, J. C. (2020). Party funding: A crisis of Zambia's multiparty politics: From 1991 to 2016. In: Banda, T., Kaaba, O., Hinfelaar, M. & Ndulo, M. (eds.) *Democracy and electoral politics in Zambia*, pp. 195–210. Leiden: Brill.
- Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). (2008). *SADC Protocol on Gender and Development*. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-08/Protocol\\_on\\_Gender\\_and\\_Development\\_2008.pdf](https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-08/Protocol_on_Gender_and_Development_2008.pdf)
- Tajali, M. (2019). Protesting gender discrimination from within: women's political representation on behalf of Islamic parties. In: Randjbar-Daemi, S. Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, E. & Banko, L. (eds.) *Political Parties in the Middle East*, pp. 26–43. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429422706-3>
- Wang, V. & Muriaas, R. L. (2019). Candidate selection and informal soft quotas for women: gender imbalance in political recruitment in Zambia. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 7(2), 401–411. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2018.1564056>
- Zambia Statistics Agency (ZamStats). (2022) *Vital Statistics Report*. [Online]. Available at <https://www.zamstats.gov.zm/publications/>



## Chapter Four

# The Nexus between Women's Gender Quotas and Political Representation: A Comparative Analysis of South Africa and Rwanda

**Refilwe Motseta** 

**Tinuade A Ojo** 

*Centre for Race, Gender and Class,  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa*

### Introduction

Over the last century, significant strides have been made in women's political representation, with countries like Rwanda and South Africa leading the way in increasing female participation in national legislatures. Rwanda, for instance, achieved 68% female representation in 2020, the highest in sub-Saharan Africa, while South Africa ranks amongst the top ten globally with 41.5% representation in its lower house. The success of these countries emphasises the importance of legislative reforms, including gender quotas, in fostering women's political participation. Gender quotas, along with the support of civil society and state institutions, play a crucial role in challenging gender biases and promoting gender equality in politics.

The political effectiveness of women is closely linked to their ability to articulate and politicise issues that affect them, advocating for policies that promote gender equality and hold decision-makers accountable. As Goetz (2003) argues, women's political effectiveness is contingent upon the relationship between voice, accountability, and representation. In South

Africa and Rwanda, women's inclusion in political processes has been facilitated by gender quotas and the empowerment of civil society movements. These movements have been instrumental in pushing for legislative reforms and advocating for women's rights, shaping the political agenda in both countries. However, despite these advances, challenges persist in ensuring that women have the political influence to shape policies that directly address gender inequality.

South Africa and Rwanda serve as valuable case studies for understanding the relationship between gender quotas and women's political representation. While both countries have made remarkable progress, particularly through constitutional gender quotas and political reforms, challenges remain in fully integrating gender equality into political decision-making. The representation of women in leadership positions does not always translate into significant influence over policies related to women's rights and gender emancipation. To further enhance women's political representation, both countries must focus on strengthening women's political influence, addressing patriarchal structures, and ensuring that gender equality is a core component of all political decisions. The lessons learned from these nations can provide valuable insights for other countries seeking to promote gender equality in politics.

### **Feminist Political Economic Theory**

The Feminist Political Economic Theory focuses on the lived experiences of gender and aims to clarify the factors that determine and influence gender dynamics in social and political relationships. It is not just concerned with the inclusion of women but emphasises the need for an equitable distribution of power and resources. This theory allows for intersectional analysis, exploring how gender, along with other systems of power like class and race, interact and affect various groups in society. Feminist political economy approaches, as seen in the work of scholars like Dorothy Smith, argue that many issues that women face stem from cultural, intellectual, and political frameworks that have historically been shaped by male

perspectives, often excluding the voices of marginalised groups (Pritlove et al., 2019; Bezanson & Luxton, 2006).

Feminist Political Economy Theory examines the role of politics in everyday life, specifically how gender, class, and race are shaped by institutions such as states, markets, households, and transnational activism. The theory is crucial in understanding the need for women's inclusion and empowerment, advocating for a fairer distribution of power and resources. While this theoretical framework has been applied in some research studies, there is a gap in the literature, highlighting the need for further exploration of feminist political economy in various contexts. This study used a qualitative desk research method, employing document analysis of secondary data from peer-reviewed journals and academic sources, to examine patterns and themes relevant to the feminist political economy framework (Wagner et al., 2012).

## **Women's Historical and Current Representation and Participation in South Africa**

Apartheid, a racially segregated system enforced in South Africa in 1948, was a manifestation of white supremacy that institutionalised racial and gendered hierarchies, with non-white South Africans facing systemic disadvantages (Jaga et al., 2018a). The apartheid regime's policies not only enforced racial separation but also perpetuated colonialism and patriarchy, ensuring that the white minority held economic and political power. Black men, for instance, were confined to unskilled labour in rural areas, leading to the disruption of family structures and reinforcing gender and racial inequalities. These policies significantly shaped South Africa's socio-economic landscape, embedding disparities that persist today (Jaga et al., 2018b).

Women played an important role in resisting apartheid, often through peaceful protests and collective action. Seripe (2022) highlights that South African women, across racial lines, united through various organisations to challenge apartheid. One notable figure was Charlotte Manye Maxeke,

who orchestrated anti-pass protests in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and led a deputation to the Prime Minister in 1918, advocating for women's rights (Makana, 2019)). Another key event in the history of women's resistance was the 1950 protest against the Urban Areas Act, where women from diverse backgrounds gathered at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, demonstrating their unity against apartheid (Seriepe, 2022).

Activists such as Dorothy Nyembe and Fatima Meer further advanced the struggle for women's rights and social justice during apartheid. Nyembe's leadership in organising protests, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, showcased the resilience of women in the fight against apartheid, culminating in her arrest in 1963 (Seriepe, 2022). Nyembe's involvement in several movements, including the ANC Women's League and *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, emphasises women's integral role in the anti-apartheid struggle (Boatman, 2020). Similarly, Fatima Meer's establishment of the Black Women's Federation focused on addressing issues such as housing, human rights, and education, contributing to the broader movement for women's rights and equality (Seriepe, 2022). These efforts helped to increase women's economic participation, with 32% of women involved in the workforce by 1960 (Seriepe, 2022).

Post-apartheid, South Africa made strides towards gender equality, although challenges persist. The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1994 marked a new phase in the country's democratic transformation, where gender equality became a central focus (Seriepe, 2022). Key milestones included the appointment of Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka as the first female deputy president in 2005 and her later role as Executive Director of UN Women (Onditi & Odera, 2021). Despite significant progress, South African women continue to face challenges such as unemployment, violence, and poverty, but they persist in overcoming barriers and advocating for their rights (South African Government, 2009). The ongoing evolution of women's political representation, such as the 46% female representation in the Cabinet, demonstrates the growing role of women in shaping South Africa's democratic future (Seriepe, 2022).

Since the end of apartheid, South Africa has made substantial progress in increasing the political participation of women. This has been largely driven by policy changes, legislative reforms, and the establishment of organisations dedicated to advocating for women's rights (Ofusori, 2021). South Africa's commitment to gender equality, as enshrined in its Constitution, has fostered an environment conducive to female political representation. Despite these advances, challenges remain in ensuring that women are adequately represented in the political arena, and ongoing reforms are essential to fully realise gender equality in the country's governance.

As of 2021, women constitute 51.2% of South Africa's population (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). This demographic reality emphasises the growing need for female political representation. South Africa's political system, based on a proportional representation (PR) model, has significantly increased the number of women in the National Assembly. In 2021, women represented approximately 46% of the National Assembly, with 36% in the National Council of Provinces (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). These figures position South Africa amongst the top countries globally for gender parity in parliament, ranking tenth in the world and third in Africa.

This increase in women's representation can be attributed to the PR system, which has facilitated a more inclusive political landscape. The flexibility of PR enables political parties to create candidate lists that reflect the diversity of the population, including women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). However, while South Africa has made remarkable strides in achieving gender equality in parliament, challenges persist, particularly regarding the direct accountability of political representatives to their constituents and the influence of party politics.

South Africa operates on a five-year electoral cycle, where members of parliament (MPs) are elected through a PR

system. In this system, MPs are appointed from party lists rather than being directly elected by constituencies. While this model has increased women's representation by allowing political parties the flexibility to nominate women candidates, it has also led to concerns about the accountability of MPs to their voters (Sibalukhulu, 2012). MPs in South Africa are often bound to their party, which can lead to a disconnect between the representatives and the people who they are meant to serve. This is particularly problematic for women, whose specific needs and concerns may be sidelined in party-driven agendas.

Despite the advantages of the PR system, such as ensuring the representation of smaller parties and diverse candidates, it has significant limitations, particularly in terms of accountability. The PR system prioritises party loyalty over direct accountability to constituents, which can undermine effective governance and responsiveness. This dynamic is particularly problematic for women, as party politics often take precedence over addressing the specific issues of the broader electorate, including women's concerns. A potential solution to this challenge is the adoption of an open-list system, where voters can influence the ranking of candidates on party lists, giving them more control over the selection of their political representatives. Additionally, a constituency-based electoral system could enhance accountability by ensuring that MPs are directly elected by geographic constituencies, aligning political representatives more closely with the needs of voters.

In South Africa, gender-sensitive legislation has played a crucial role in addressing women's issues, particularly gender-based violence (GBV). In 2021, the National Assembly passed two significant GBV bills aimed at strengthening protection for women. However, the implementation and enforcement of these laws remain significant challenges caused by societal attitudes, resource allocation, and the effectiveness of law enforcement. Political parties in South Africa have a central role in shaping women's representation through the party list system, which allows for gender parity. However, party politics can sometimes overshadow the needs of individual citizens, including women, especially when the inclusion of women on party lists is driven



more by political considerations than by a genuine commitment to gender equality. The lack of direct accountability between MPs and their constituents further complicates efforts to ensure that women's concerns are adequately addressed.

To address these concerns, there is a growing call for electoral reforms that would allow for greater accountability and more direct representation of women in politics. Implementing a constituency-based system would allow MPs to be directly accountable to their voters, which could increase the responsiveness of political representatives to women's issues. Furthermore, an open-list system, where voters can influence the ranking of candidates on party lists, would empower women to play a more active role in the electoral process and in shaping political agendas (Chukwuemeka, 2020).

Prominent women in South African politics have played an important role in advocating for gender equality and women's rights. Figures such as Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, who served as the Minister of Health and later as the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, and Baleka Mbete, former Speaker of the National Assembly, have made significant contributions to the political landscape in South Africa. Their leadership has helped to pave the way for greater female participation in politics, setting an example for future generations of women leaders.

Furthermore, the establishment of women's organisations, such as the African National Congress (ANC) Women's League, has provided a platform for advocating for the rights and interests of women in South Africa's political system. These organisations have been instrumental in promoting policy reforms aimed at addressing gender inequality and ensuring that women's voices are heard in the political process.

## **Women's Historical Representation and Participation in Rwanda**

The Rwandan Genocide of 1994, a catastrophic ethnic conflict primarily between the Hutu majority and Tutsi minority, resulted in the mass killing of approximately 800,000 people,

predominantly Tutsis. The genocide, which began in Kigali and quickly spread across Rwanda, was fuelled by long-standing ethnic tensions and intensified by the political mobilisation of local officials who incited violence. The conflict not only caused widespread loss of life but also led to a massive displacement crisis, with millions of refugees fleeing the violence. The Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) military intervention aimed to end the genocide but could not undo the immense devastation (History.com, 2022).

Since the 1994 genocide, Rwanda has experienced a remarkable transformation, emerging as a model of gender equality, with women playing a central role in the nation's reconstruction. The genocide left a devastating impact, with women making up 70% of the remaining population, and many of them took on leadership roles in rebuilding the country. Today, Rwanda boasts the highest percentage of women in parliament globally, with women holding 64% of the parliamentary seats. This achievement is a direct result of the active involvement of women in political leadership and grassroots efforts to address the country's critical issues, such as education, health, and family life. The shift towards women's leadership was supported by male and female leaders, recognising women's resilience in the post-genocide era.

Prominent figures, such as Eugenie Mukeshimana, Chantal Kayitesi, Odette Nyiramilimo, Christine Tuyisenge, and others, have been instrumental in advocating for women's rights and gender equality in Rwanda's recovery process. Mukeshimana's survival story highlighted the resilience of Rwandan women, while Kayitesi's efforts to support widows and orphans and advocate for sexual violence as a crime against humanity played a significant role in Rwanda's legal recovery. Nyiramilimo, Tuyisenge, and other women in leadership positions helped to shape Rwanda's policies, focusing on gender-based violence, women's rights, and social welfare. Their contributions have been vital in the country's progress towards gender equality and in positioning Rwanda as a global leader in women's political representation.

Rwanda's journey towards gender equality has not been without challenges, as the deeply ingrained patriarchal system continued to exert influence over the country's history. However, through policies such as the National Gender Policy and efforts to involve men and boys in promoting gender equality, Rwanda has made significant strides in closing the gender gap. The implementation of such policies reflects Rwanda's commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or disability. As Rwanda continues to refine its policies, particularly in areas such as girls' education and gender-based violence, the country's relentless drive for improvement remains at the heart of its development vision, creating an example for others to follow in achieving gender equality and inclusive leadership.

## **Analysis of Shared Approaches and Lessons on Gender Quotas in Political Representation in South Africa and Rwanda**

### **Gender Quotas in South Africa and Rwanda**

Gender quotas have played a central role in increasing women's political representation in South Africa and Rwanda, two countries that have made significant strides in advancing gender equality in politics. Although these nations differ in their historical and political contexts, their adoption of gender quotas has resulted in notable progress, with Rwanda emerging as a global leader in female political representation. This analysis explores the gender quota systems in South Africa and Rwanda, highlighting their impact and the lessons that can be drawn from each country's experience.

Rwanda is widely regarded as a model for gender equality in political representation, with women holding an unprecedented 63.8% of the seats in the Rwandan Chamber of Deputies as of 2021 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). This level of representation is the highest in the world, a feat largely attributed to the country's comprehensive gender quota system. The Rwandan government implemented a series of

quotas aimed at increasing women's political participation, including a constitutional provision that reserves 30% of seats in the national parliament and local government for women. Furthermore, the ruling RPF has adopted a 50/50 gender policy for its candidate lists, ensuring an equal number of men and women on the party's electoral lists (Morojele, 2016). The success of these measures is rooted in the political will of the government, which has prioritised gender equality as a cornerstone of national development.

In contrast, South Africa's approach to gender quotas has been less rigid, but it has still yielded substantial progress in women's political representation. South Africa's gender quota system is primarily party-driven, with the ANC leading the way in implementing a policy of gender parity on its candidate lists. The ANC's policy stipulates that at least one-third of its candidates for parliamentary seats must be women, which has significantly increased the number of women in South Africa's National Assembly (Morojele, 2016). As of the 2019 elections, women accounted for approximately 41.5% of the National Assembly seats, making South Africa one of the top countries globally in terms of female parliamentary representation (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). However, this progress has been tempered by the fact that other political parties in South Africa have not consistently adopted gender quotas, limiting the overall impact of the system on the national legislature (Hughes et al., 2019).

The differences in the implementation of gender quotas in Rwanda and South Africa emphasise the importance of political will and comprehensive policy design in achieving gender parity. Rwanda's constitutional quota system, coupled with the RPF's strict gender policy, has allowed for greater consistency in female political representation across the board. In contrast, South Africa's reliance on voluntary party quotas means that the gender balance in parliament is subject to the political priorities of individual parties, resulting in uneven progress across the political spectrum.

Despite these differences, both countries' experiences offer important lessons for other nations seeking to improve women's political participation. First, the example of Rwanda demonstrates that quotas must be accompanied by strong institutional support and political commitment. Rwanda's success is not just a product of its quota system but also the result of broader societal changes aimed at promoting gender equality in all spheres of life. Additionally, Rwanda's adoption of a 50/50 gender policy by its ruling party is an indication of how political leadership can drive systemic change (Morojele, 2016).

In South Africa, the lesson lies in the importance of consistent, party-wide implementation of gender quotas. While the ANC's efforts have contributed to significant gains in women's representation, the lack of quotas in other major political parties has hindered the country from achieving true gender parity in parliament. This suggests that for gender quotas to be fully effective, they must be adopted across all political parties to ensure that women are represented proportionately, regardless of party affiliation.

In summary, the gender quota systems in South Africa and Rwanda have been crucial in increasing women's political representation. Rwanda's comprehensive constitutional quotas, combined with a strong political commitment to gender equality, have led to the highest levels of female representation in the world. South Africa has also made significant progress, but the lack of a universal quota system across all political parties means that there is still room for improvement. Both countries offer valuable lessons in how gender quotas can be implemented to foster greater gender equality in political participation, with the need for sustained political will and the broader social transformation of gender norms being critical to their success.

### **Shared Approaches Used on Gender Quotas**

South Africa and Rwanda have both implemented gender quotas as part of their broader efforts to promote gender equality in political representation. In Rwanda, the quota

system is constitutionally mandated, and the country has been widely recognised for its outstanding achievements in women's political participation. The Rwandan Constitution, adopted in 2003, stipulates that at least 30% of the seats in the lower and upper chambers of parliament must be occupied by women (Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda, 2015). As a result, Rwanda boasts one of the highest percentages of female parliamentarians globally, with women holding 61.3% of the seats in the lower house of parliament as of 2021 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021).

Similarly, South Africa's gender quota system is implemented through its electoral laws. The country uses a proportional representation system, which includes a provision for gender parity within party lists. The South African Constitution enshrines the principle of gender equality, and political parties are encouraged to place women in winnable positions on their candidate lists. As a result, South Africa is ranked amongst the top countries in the world for women's political representation, with women holding 46% of the seats in the National Assembly in 2021 (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). These efforts are part of a broader commitment to gender equality in the post-apartheid era.

One shared feature of both countries' approaches is the emphasis on legislated quotas that ensure women's representation in political offices. These quotas have led to a significant increase in female representation in legislative bodies, creating opportunities for women to influence policy and decision-making processes in both countries. In Rwanda, the use of women's representation in local government and the national parliament has become a model for gender equality worldwide, while South Africa's focus on gender parity within political parties has been critical in ensuring that women can access leadership positions in government.

### **Effectiveness of Gender Quotas in Achieving Gender Parity**

The effectiveness of gender quotas in achieving gender parity in political representation has been demonstrated in

South Africa and Rwanda, albeit with differing outcomes and challenges. Rwanda has achieved remarkable success in this area, with women currently holding 63.8% of the seats in its lower house, making it one of the highest in the world (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). This success is largely attributed to the country's strong commitment to gender equality, backed by the implementation of a 30% gender quota for women in parliament, which was later expanded to ensure 50/50 gender parity on political party candidate lists (Tripp et al., 2009). The political will demonstrated by the RPF, which mandates equal representation of men and women on candidate lists, has been critical to achieving these outcomes. The Rwandan model showcases the significant role of political leadership in driving gender parity through quotas, as well as the value of a proportional representation electoral system that ensures women's inclusion in governance.

In contrast, South Africa has made significant strides in increasing women's political representation, mainly through its adoption of gender quotas, but it still faces challenges in achieving full gender parity. The ANC, South Africa's ruling party, implemented a policy of gender quotas, requiring that at least 50% of candidates on party lists be women (Hughes et al., 2019). This has led to South Africa ranking 10<sup>th</sup> globally regarding women's representation in parliament, with women holding 41.5% of the seats in the National Assembly as of 2021 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). However, the effectiveness of the quotas has been tempered by challenges such as the marginalisation of women in senior political positions and the relatively low number of women in leadership roles within political parties (Morofele, 2016). The lack of gender parity in executive and ministerial positions highlights that quotas alone are insufficient without political will to ensure women's equal participation at all levels of governance.

While gender quotas have undoubtedly contributed to increased female representation in South Africa and Rwanda, the implementation and outcomes of these quotas have been shaped by different political and cultural contexts. Rwanda's success demonstrates the importance of political will and leadership

in ensuring gender equality in political representation. The country's high levels of women's political participation are a direct result of consistent efforts by the government to institutionalise gender equality. In contrast, South Africa's experience highlights that while quotas can increase the number of women in parliament, additional structural reforms and shifts in party dynamics are necessary to ensure that women achieve parity not just in terms of numbers but also in power and influence within political institutions. Therefore, the lessons from both countries emphasise the importance of integrating gender quotas with broader strategies for women's empowerment and political leadership development.

### **Electoral Systems and Broader Political Factors Influencing Gender Quotas in South Africa and Rwanda**

South Africa and Rwanda both employ a closed party-list proportional representation (PR) electoral system, a model widely associated with high levels of women's representation in legislative bodies (Morojele, 2016). This system is designed to enable minority groups, including women, to gain more representation in national politics by allowing political parties to compile candidate lists and assign seats based on the proportion of votes each party receives. The PR system, according to Hughes et al. (2019), has been proven to be more beneficial for women's political participation compared to majoritarian electoral systems, which tend to perpetuate existing power dynamics and male-dominated political structures.

In South Africa, the PR system has played a critical role in increasing the number of women in parliament. According to recent figures, women make up approximately 46% of South Africa's National Assembly, making it one of the most gender-representative parliaments globally (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). However, the impact of this system is influenced by political parties' internal policies regarding the placement of women on candidate lists. The ANC, South Africa's dominant political party, has instituted a policy of gender quotas, which, at best, ensures that every third candidate on their list is a woman. Despite this, the overall representation of women in



South Africa lags that of Rwanda, where the PR system has resulted in women occupying 63.8% of parliamentary seats (Hughes et al., 2019).

Rwanda's higher level of female representation can be attributed to the combination of the PR system and strong political will, particularly within the ruling party, the RPF. The RPF has implemented a 50/50 gender policy on their candidate lists, ensuring a more balanced representation of women and men. This deliberate placement of women on candidate lists has significantly boosted female representation, far surpassing South Africa's achievement (Morojele, 2016). In contrast, South Africa's lack of consistent party-wide adoption of quotas by other major political parties has hindered the country from reaching similar levels of gender parity.

While the PR system is a crucial element in enhancing women's political participation, the key factor in both countries' success is the strategic placement of women candidates on party lists. The lesson from Rwanda is clear: the more stringent the gender quotas and the more committed the political leadership is to gender equality, the higher the level of women's representation in parliament. South Africa's experience, on the other hand, highlights the need for broader adoption of gender quotas across all political parties, as well as stronger political will to implement these measures.

In conclusion, the adoption of a closed-party list PR system is an effective means of increasing women's representation, but it must be coupled with a strong political commitment to ensure that women are placed strategically on candidate lists. Rwanda's success in achieving higher levels of female representation offers valuable lessons for South Africa and other countries seeking to enhance women's political participation. Political will and consistent quota implementation are essential to achieving gender equality in political representation, and these lessons should be central to ongoing reforms in South Africa's electoral system.

## **Lessons To Be Learnt**

The experiences of South Africa and Rwanda in using gender quotas offer several important lessons for other countries seeking to increase women's political representation. One of the key lessons is the importance of strong political will and commitment at the highest levels of government. In Rwanda, the government's commitment to gender equality is evident in the legal framework and the broader political culture. The RPF, led by President Paul Kagame, has actively promoted women's participation in governance, with the government consistently prioritising gender equality in national development strategies (Burnet, 2012). This top-down approach has played a significant role in Rwanda's success.

South Africa's commitment to gender equality is similarly reflected in the post-apartheid constitutional framework, which guarantees equality for all citizens, including women. However, while the country has made significant strides in increasing women's representation in parliament, the impact of gender quotas has been somewhat limited by the political party system, which often prioritises party loyalty over direct constituency representation (Sibalukhulu, 2012). As a result, there is a need to further empower women within the party system and ensure that political structures are more accountable to the needs and concerns of women constituents.

A second lesson is creating a supportive environment for women in politics. In Rwanda, women have access to various forms of support, including mentorship programmes and leadership training, which have contributed to their success in political roles. These programmes have helped women build the skills and confidence necessary to participate effectively in governance. Similarly, South Africa has seen the establishment of networks and organisations to support women in politics, such as the Women's Parliament, which offers a platform for women to engage with political leaders and discuss issues of importance (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). Providing training and leadership development opportunities is crucial in

ensuring that women are not only present in politics but are also equipped to lead effectively.

Another lesson is the importance of intersectionality in designing and implementing gender quotas. In both countries, quotas have been instrumental in ensuring women's representation. Still, there is an ongoing challenge to ensure that the most marginalised women, such as those from rural areas, are adequately represented. In South Africa, the inclusion of women from different racial and social backgrounds has been a key focus, particularly in a country with a history of racial and economic inequality (Ofusori, 2021). Similarly, while Rwanda's gender quotas have largely been successful in increasing female representation, there is still room to address the intersectional challenges faced by women, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnic minorities.

Finally, both countries demonstrate the importance of monitoring and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of gender quotas. In Rwanda, continuous assessments of the quota system's impact have ensured that women's political representation remains a priority, and adjustments have been made to improve the system. South Africa's Parliamentary Monitoring Group similarly emphasises the importance of tracking progress in achieving gender parity and ensuring that women's voices are heard in political decision-making (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2021). This process of evaluation and adjustment is essential for ensuring that gender quotas do not become a mere formality but lead to meaningful change.

The gender quotas implemented in Rwanda and South Africa offer valuable insights for other countries striving to improve women's political representation. While each country's approach has unique aspects, the shared focus on legislated quotas, political will, and creating supportive environments for women in politics has been fundamental to their success. Lessons drawn from these experiences emphasise the importance of strong political commitment, intersectionality, and continuous evaluation to ensure that gender quotas lead

to meaningful and sustained change. These lessons are crucial for enhancing women's political representation globally and ensuring that women are not only present in political spaces but are also empowered to lead and influence governance effectively.

### **The Way Forward: Addressing the Gaps in Women's Political Representation**

While South Africa and Rwanda have made significant strides in increasing women's political representation, the work is far from complete. While beneficial in some respects, the country's electoral system still presents challenges to achieving full gender equality in politics. Reforms such as implementing a constituency-based system, open-list voting, and stronger mechanisms for holding MPs accountable to their constituents are necessary to ensure that women are not only represented but are also able to shape political decision-making actively.

Moreover, special attention must be given to ensuring that women from marginalised groups, including rural women, women with disabilities, and those from LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and others) communities, are adequately represented in the political process. As both countries progress, it is essential to continue pushing for reforms that will empower women to take on leadership roles and contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable political system.

### **Conclusion**

This research has explored the nexus between women's gender quotas and political representation in South Africa and Rwanda, providing a comparative analysis of how each country has approached increasing female political participation. Both countries have made significant strides in improving the representation of women in political offices. Still, their strategies and the effectiveness of their gender quotas differ significantly, influenced by their unique historical, cultural, and political contexts.

Rwanda's success in achieving gender parity in politics, exemplified by its global-leading representation of women in parliament, highlights the effectiveness of comprehensive constitutional quotas, strong political will and party-level commitment to gender equality. The Rwandan experience demonstrates that quotas, supported by institutional mechanisms and broader societal shifts, can lead to profound and sustained changes in women's political empowerment. The Rwandan model provides key lessons for other nations, particularly regarding the importance of a unified, top-down approach that includes legal mandates, party policies, and public awareness campaigns.

In contrast, South Africa's experience highlights the importance of voluntary quotas within political parties, most notably the ANC. While South Africa's approach has led to substantial gains in women's representation, the lack of consistent quotas across all political parties has resulted in a more uneven representation in parliament. The South African case emphasises the need for broader adoption of gender quotas across the political spectrum to achieve true gender parity. Additionally, the reliance on party politics rather than mandated constitutional quotas suggests that women's representation is susceptible to shifts in political priorities, which can undermine the sustainability of progress towards gender equality.

Ultimately, this research reveals that gender quotas can be a powerful tool for increasing women's political representation, but their effectiveness depends on a combination of factors: political will, the design of the quota system, and the broader socio-political environment. The experiences of South Africa and Rwanda offer valuable lessons for other nations seeking to improve women's political participation. It is clear that gender quotas alone are not sufficient to achieve gender parity in political representation; they must be part of a wider framework of legal, social, and political reforms that support the empowerment of women and challenge existing gender norms.

For future progress, countries aiming to enhance women's political representation must consider adopting more inclusive

and consistent quota systems, ensuring that gender equality in politics becomes a permanent feature of their democratic processes. Moreover, the focus should not only be on numerical representation but also on ensuring that women in political office have the power, support, and resources to influence policy and drive societal change. Through such comprehensive strategies, nations can move closer to achieving true gender equality in political representation.

### References

- Bezanson, K. & Luxton, M. (2006). *Social reproduction: Feminist political economy challenges neo-liberalism*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780773576902>
- Boatman, A. (2020). Dorothy Nyembe and her role in the South African anti-apartheid movement. *African Studies Review*, 1(1), 1-13.
- Brown, M.S. (2021a). Comparative genocide pedagogy and survivor testimony: Lessons from a unit on the holocaust and the Rwandan genocide. *The History Teacher*, 54(2), 1-40.
- Brown, T. (2021b). Women's resilience in the Rwandan Genocide: A personal account. *Rwandan Journal of Gender Studies*, 1(2), 1-40.
- Burnet, J. E. (2012). *Genocide lives in us: Women, memory, and silence in Rwanda*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda. (2015). Retrieved September 12, 2025, from [https://adsdatabase.ohchr.org/IssueLibrary/RWANDA\\_Constitution.pdf](https://adsdatabase.ohchr.org/IssueLibrary/RWANDA_Constitution.pdf)
- Chukwuemeka, S. E. (2020). Advantages and disadvantages of proportional representation. para.1-16.
- Goetz, M.A. (2003). Women's political effectiveness: A conceptual framework. In: A. M. Goetz & S. Hassim (eds.) *No shortcuts to power: African women in politics and policy making*, pp: 29-80. London: Zed Books.
- History.com. (eds.) (2022). *Rwandan Genocide*. History.com. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.history.com/topics/africa/rwandan-genocide>

- Hughes, M. M., Paxton, P., Clayton, A. B. & Zetterberg, P. (2019). Global gender quota adoption, implementation, and reform. *Comparative Politics*, 51(2), 219–238. <https://doi.org/10.5129/001041519X15647434969795>
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). (2021). *Women in National Parliaments*. [online] Available at: <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages> [Accessed: 24 December 2024].
- Jaga, A., Arabandi, B., Bagraim, J. & Mdlongwa, S. (2018). Doing the ‘gender dance’: Black women professionals negotiating gender, race, work and family in post-apartheid South Africa. *Community, Work & Family*, 21(4), 429–444. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2017.1311840>
- Makana, S. (2019). Women in Nationalist Movements. In: *Oxford research encyclopedia of African history*, pp. 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.655>
- Morojele, T. (2016). The impact of electoral systems on women’s political representation: A comparative chapter of South Africa and Rwanda’. *Journal of African Political Studies*, 1(164), 1–18.
- Ofusori, L. (2021). *Strengthening women’s political participation and decision making in South Africa*. para.1–8.
- Onditi, F. & Odera, S. (2021). Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka: Advancing women’s rights in South Africa and beyond. *African Women’s Leadership Journal*, 16(2), 247–266. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-71095-8\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-71095-8_11)
- Parliamentary Monitoring Group. (2021). *South Africa’s Political Representation: Gender and Diversity*. [Online]. Available at: <https://pmg.org.za> [Accessed: 24 December 2024].
- Patel, F. (2022). *We must celebrate the achievements of South African women*. Moneyweb, 9 Aug 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.moneyweb.co.za/news/south-africa/we-must-celebrate-the-achievements-of-south-african-women/> [Accessed: September 12, 2025].
- Pritlove, C., Safai, P., Angus, J.E., Armstrong, P., Jones, J.M. & Parsons, J. (2019). “It’s hard work”: A feminist political economy approach to reconceptualizing “Work” in the cancer context. *Qualitative Health Research*, 29(5), 758–773. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732318803885>

- Seripe, A. (2022). Women's resistance in apartheid South Africa: A historical overview. *Journal of South African Women's Studies*, 38(1), 1–8.
- Sibalukhulu, N. (2012). SA's electoral system fails the people. para.1–27.
- South African Government. (2009). *The progress of gender equality in post-apartheid South Africa*. South African Government Publications.
- Tripp, A. M., Casimiro, I., Kwesiga, J. & Mungwa, A. (2009). African women's movements. *Changing Political Landscapes*. New York. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511800351>
- Wagner, C., Kawulich, B. & Garner, M. (2012). *EBOOK: Doing social research: A global context*. New York: McGraw Hill, pp: 1–259.



## Chapter Five

# Women's Political Representation and Participation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature: Prospects, Consequences, and Implications

**Tafadzwa Clementine Maramura** 

*Department of Public Administration and Management  
University of the Free State   
Bloemfontein, South Africa  
MaramuraTC@ufs.ac.za*

**Torque Mude** 

*Department of Public Management and Political Studies  
University of Namibia   
Windhoek, Namibia  
mudetorque@gmail.com*

**Mzoleli Mrara** 

*Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature   
Bisho, South Africa  
mzolelimrara@gmail.com*

**Stellah Lubinga** 

*Economic and Management Sciences  
University of Pretoria   
Pretoria, South Africa  
stellah.lubinga@up.ac.za*

## Introduction

Across the globe, in the full exercise of their right to participate, women continue to face considerable discrimination. As a result of access to power at all levels, they face a multitude of major obstacles to decision-making, even though half the world's population is made up of them (IDEA, 2013). Part of the pre-requisites for democratic governance is the equal and active involvement of women within the political circle. It is imperative to include and enable women to partake in the resolution procedures, which mostly are important in bringing about sustainable development in poor economies across the developing world. The global picture, however, paints a tainted image where, because of lack of resources, poor healthcare, poor quality of education, which has disproportionately low access, discriminatory cultural practices, institutional barriers, and restrictive laws, in terms of entrance into the political sphere, inequality and marginalisation remain for women and girls (DiLanzo, 2018). In essence, women have a right to engage and express themselves in systems and organisations where choices are made that impact their lives (IDEA, 2013).

Women's under-representation is evident in the predominance of men amongst parliamentarians, cabinet ministers, and representatives of the judiciary, local and regional officials, government and state heads, and executives within the private sector (Nhundu, 2013). Some significant qualitative and quantitative progress has been made towards growing women's participation and representation since the Beijing Platform of Action (FWCW, 1995) was funded, especially at the legislative level, although this progress is slow and inconsistent across the world's regions (Vetten, 2016). This is quite a common phenomenon amongst many African countries like Morocco (5.6%), Nigeria (8%), and Mauritius (8.7%), as noted by Musau (2019), where the representation of women at the political level is still low. Thus, this is a major challenge in fighting poverty, unemployment, development, and inequality, which characterises the development trajectory of these countries.

Women's talents and leadership have been untapped, thus leading to the growing recognition of this notion. This is in relation to their limited participation and representation in politics. Their active involvement within the political sphere is a mechanism to pave the way for their contribution in decision-making processes, ultimately leading to their influence in policymaking issues and thus the advancement of gender equality. Legislators have an influence in policymaking and priorities, whether they are female or male, and thus there is a need for women to remain actively involved to have their issues and concerns addressed by those representing them (National Democratic Institute, 2015). Furthermore, women's involvement will ensure that governance issues are well adhered to and that women have a voice within the political sphere. Thus, women's contribution and demonstration within the political fraternity is a crucial element in influencing policies that are geared towards gender equality.

Several international and continental treaties have been ratified and signed by the country as part of its efforts to address women's issues and empower them. On the African continent, these include the Dakar Platform for Action of 1994; the Beijing Platform of Action for the Advancement of Women of 1995 (UN, 1995), and the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the rights of Women in Africa of 2003 (Kivoi, 2014). On the international front, these include the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and the Cairo Conference on Population and Development of 1994 (Kivoi, 2014). These statutes were created because of the mounting challenges that women face within the political spectrum despite global efforts to improve their conditions and ultimately address the inequalities that they are facing. In essence, the equivalent political contribution of men and women is an important aspect in ensuring that good governance prevails, and this includes the respect of one's fundamental rights and the freedom of expression.

Moreover, South Africa uses three forms and approaches to ensure political representation of women within its

parliamentary structures. These mainly include (i) the voluntary promotion of rations by the African National Congress (ANC), (ii) draft legislation mandating gender equality in partisan formations and (iii) women's parties (Vetten, 2016). It is because of these policies that South Africa has a high level of women's representation within its political spheres. Furthermore, this has been largely influenced by the ANC's policy and stance towards women's empowerment, as evidenced in its obligation to a 30% active involvement quota of women in 1999, which significantly increased to 50% by 2004 (Sadie, 2014). Since 1994, the ANC policy on women's representation and participation has evolved, resulting in the quota system being the main agenda.

Women's political representation took a slump in 2014, when it declined to 40.8% (Sadie, 2014). This meant that the Protocol on Gender set by the regional body SADC (Southern African Development Community) on gender parity ahead of the 2015 deadline was not met. With the provincial legislatures, the representation of women dropped from 41% to 37% (Sadie, 2014). Regarding the cabinet, there was a 41% involvement of women and most significantly, the number of women premiers dropped from five in 2009 to two in 2014 (Sadie, 2014). However, in 2019 the new cabinet that was announced met the 50/50 gender quota with half of the new cabinet constituting women (Fleming, 2019), a significant stride forward for the empowerment of women. In 2011, local government also witnessed a decline in women's representation from 40% to 38% (Sadie, 2014). Some of the reasons for this predicament can be attributed to the decline in the engrossment of women such as the intensification in the number of opposition parties and failure by the ANC to adhere to its quota policy in its party list.

Taking a closer look at the local governance sphere, women's representation in local government has risen from 38% in 2011 to 41% in 2016 in the local government/municipal elections (Hick et al., 2016). There have been several significant achievements on the political front with respect to females' input in the field of local administration and governance. By and large, meaningful representation of women should be prioritised by public institutions to provide a leeway for more women to

be vigorously involved in politics as part of the measures to ensure gender parity. Despite the introduction of the quota system by the ANC, there are still difficulties in ensuring the empowerment of women on the political front and the guarantee of a viable and successful empowerment agenda for women. Despite being voted for in local government structures, women still face barriers, such as a lack of training and support, unfamiliarity with the procedures and linguistics and the existence of patriarchal norms. These are constraining issues to the effective partaking of women in political affairs within the local government structure. Therefore, it is imperative that an inclusive environment is created to accommodate and nurture women within the political sphere, and this should extend beyond their numerical representation (Stats SA, 2016).

In the national legislature, the number of seats occupied by women is used as a metric to assess progress towards women's empowerment. The ANC (2012), however, has noted with concern the significant reduction of women mayors over the years. Despite the increase at the national level, it is also imperative to measure women's representation within the lower levels, such as the local government spheres, to determine progress that has been made towards achieving gender parity. In essence, the active immersion of women in politics is key in achieving gender parity and that women have a meaningful contribution to make towards the attainment of good governance (Stats SA, 2016).

According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2016), the local government sphere has lower (11%) proportions of the representation of women. Females' participation at this stage is significant since local government structures deal with the daily lives of women and thus their involvement at this level can influence policy and decision-making processes to improve their lives (Stats SA, 2016). The input of women, at the national and provincial levels, is crucial to advancing women's empowerment. It is also a forum that can be used to consider the key role that women play in the processes of policymaking and decision-making to help to shape gender equity and parity. In the recently announced 2019 cabinet, President Cyril

Ramaphosa noted that, “for the first time in the history of our country, half of all the ministers are women” (Times Live, 2019). This is quite a huge milestone in reference to women’s involvement at the national level, with the ANC promising to deliver on its quota system. However, the provincial legislatures across the country are quite a sharp contrast. In relation to these circumstantial views, the current chapter, therefore, aims to explore the opportunities, repercussions and consequences of the contribution and representation of women in the Eastern Cape (EC) Provincial Legislature.

### Issues of Debate

The relationship between gender parity and development is well-documented. The UNDP (2018) acknowledged that equal political representation is a precondition for women’s emancipation. Based on numerous legislative and regulatory statutes such as the National Policy Framework for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) and the quota system guiding political parties, it is apparent that South Africa envisions institutions where women are fully represented (Hills, 2015). Despite the existence of numerous statutes and policies that seek to promote the emancipation of women, closer scrutiny of the current status quo reveals that gender gaps are still evident, and little progress has been made thus far. This has resulted in the Commission for Gender Equality (2016) declaring that women, as likened to their male colleagues within the political spectrum, are still under-represented. Even though decision-making processes and entrance into political authority by women has developed ever since the dawn of democracy in 1994, there is still an urgent need for political institutions to be proactive to the prerequisites of female politicians. Without a shred of doubt, the contribution of women in politics is an essential ingredient in accomplishing gender fairness and improving female’s lives, despite them being the majority in terms of the population figures (Goldblatt, 2014).

Relatively more has been achieved by South Africa, which ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1996, in uplifting

women and children, and in gender impartiality. However, this aim has not been accomplished because of the government's commitment to intensifying women's image and achieving gender parity. As a result, more needs to be undertaken to reach the target of 50/50 parity (as adopted at the ANC Nasrec Conference held in Johannesburg in 2017) and thereby increase gender equality and local government representation. The Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature has not achieved gender equity and representation because of a lack of 50/50 parity. In terms of gender representation in the current Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature, there are presently 27 women legislators across all political parties as opposed to 37 male legislators (Gender Links, 2019). On average, the gender representation of the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature places women at 42% as compared to 58% males (Gender Links, 2019). This is a disproportionate representation of women affecting their political representation and involvement in the decision-making process within the legislature.

The absence of women in leadership positions within the political terrain has dire consequences for the socio-economic development of communities. Women's population outnumbers that of men, and yet they do not have a voice representing their interests in the political arena. As of mid-2024, South Africa's population reached approximately 63 million, with women accounting for about 32.13 million (51%) and men approximately 30.89 million (49%) of the total population (StatsSA, 2024). In turn, this means that the interests of other vulnerable groups, such as youths and children, are not represented. The decision-making processes will rest in the hands of their male counterparts, indicating the absence of legitimacy and representativeness of such political structures. In addition, women's inclusion in the political arena is a crucial element in ensuring that democratic governance, openness, and accountability take place and that their absence in this respect challenges democracy's prerequisites and benchmarks.

By participating in politics, women can promote gender equality. However, it is difficult to achieve this with the current situation that alienates women from occupying leadership

positions because of party politics and the patriarchal nature of societies, amongst other reasons. Therefore, this is the main consequence that arises from gender imbalances in government institutions because of the continuous marginalisation of women. In this scenario, women remain as subordinates to their male counterparts and their potential in contributing to development is stifled. It contrasts with this experience that the present research sought to analyse the prospects, consequences and implications of women's participation and representation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature.

A variety of studies and research on substantive participation and inclusion of women in the field of South African political administration have been conducted. Hills' (2015) article aims to investigate the degree to which, in the South African context, policies and regulatory statutes have responded to the problem of women's empowerment. It criticises the fact that the quota system has had insufficient influence on ensuring that women have a say in matters concerning their daily lives. An article by Rosen (2017) provides an analysis of the quota system and the influence it plays in influencing meaningful women's representation in the South African political context. Vetten's (2016) research, meanwhile, traces the history of South African women's political participation since the first democratic elections in 1994. It explores the gains that have been made policy-wise in relation to implementation and practice. The point of departure in this chapter is that political representation is not an end in itself; it must go beyond mere participation to influence changes in women's lives. On the other hand, Gouws (2011) provides an analysis of women's representation, with a specific focus on the government. The role that political parties play in achieving gender diversity is discussed in this chapter.

### **Social exclusion theory**

A citizen's right to participate in society is one of the most important directions of contemporary society development (Eflova et al., 2017). The social exclusion phenomenon was developed as a scientific theory and has now become a socio-



political discourse. Social exclusion theory was developed as an attempt by Western scholars to discuss issues of poverty and marginalisation (Eflova et al., 2017). Individuals and groups excluded from the social mainstream were chosen as the subject of the research and in this case, women are still marginalised and segregated even in politics. Social exclusion is commonly defined as a complex process of incremental multidimensional rupture of the 'social bond' at the person and collective levels (Silver, 2007). Therefore, the theory of social exclusion was used in the chapter to understand how women are stripped away from multiple dimensions of social involvement, resulting in their social isolation (Silver, 2007). This has negative consequences on their participation and representation in politics because of the patriarchal nature of societies that discriminate and segregate them from participating and holding positions of leadership in politics.

### **Critical mass theory**

Political scientists concerned with gender relations have long been interested in the numbers of women in national legislatures. Women make up slightly more than 50% of the world's population, but on average, make up just 16% of the world's elected political posts (Grey, 2006). This has contributed to calls for action to increase the number of women in legislatures on the grounds of justice concerns and suggestions that an increase would significantly alter decision-making processes and performance (Grey, 2006). Part of the conversation on major changes in democratic decision-making focused on whether women in the legislature must hit a "critical mass" to shift the political arena (Grey, 2006). Therefore, to explain the dynamics and interplay of numbers and how this could increase the number of women taking part in politics, the critical mass hypothesis was used. The increasing chants of critical mass have led several countries across the globe to implement the gender quota system to increase women's participation in the political sphere.

The contribution of women in the political domain is important in recognising the important part played by them in

influencing decision-making and policymaking. Despite this notion, women continue to have, and are still faced with, low representation in politics, which is an impediment to achieving gender equality and parity. This is fundamentally caused by several dynamics that relate to economic, political, social, cultural and educational barriers, as articulated in Figure 1.

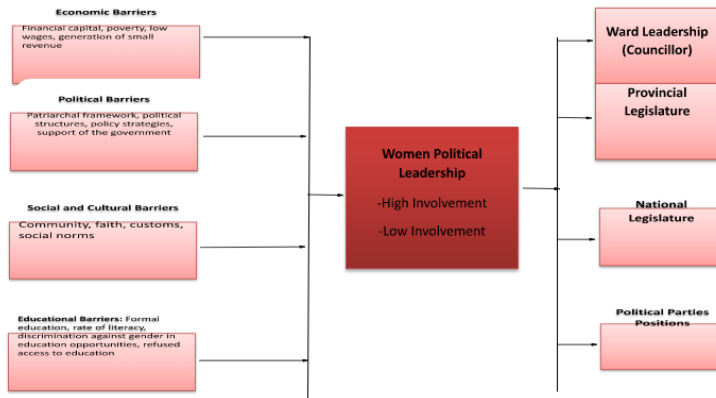


**Figure 1:** Barriers to women's political participation and representation. Source: Stanus (2016)

The notion presented in the conceptual framework above is that dealing with these challenges can lead to high participation of women in political leadership, which would result in them participating and being represented at ward, provincial legislature, national legislature, and political parties' levels. If not properly dealt with, this would result in low numbers of women in these various platforms. Within the political process in South Africa, politicians and scholars have hailed the progressive legal framework which provides the platform for significant strides that have been made thus far towards women's empowerment, gender equality and parity as a success story in South Africa, given the history of apartheid towards marginalised and disadvantaged groups such as women (Sadie, 2014).

## Methodology

A phenomenological model was introduced, considering the qualitative aspect of the analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Qualitative research paradigms, also known as constructivist/social constructivist, interpretive (De Vos et al., 2018), naturalistic, post-positive or post-modern perspective (Liu et al., 2018), concentrate on a phenomenon's structural, descriptive, and deeply comprehensive meaning. The lawmakers (males and females) served as a case for the sub-chapter. Denscombe (2014:31) is of the opinion that the defining feature of the case chapter methodology and its emphasis is also to focus on what needs to be investigated.

The goal of this chapter is to explore women's political representation and participation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature, with a particular focus on the prospects, consequences, and implications. The chapter deliberately chose the provincial legislature as a case chapter, as it is considered a provincial structure with immense powers in the political governance of the province because of the representation of different political parties. Selective/purposive sampling methodology (Newman, 2014:278) was employed to select a sample group (Brynard et al., 2014).

The population in this chapter was made up of 10 legislators, 5 leaders of political parties, 4 members of the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Department and the legislature's speaker. The chapter used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research to identify and define information-rich cases for the most efficient use of limited resources (Patton, 2015). It involves selecting and recognising groups of individuals or individuals who are particularly familiar with or informed about a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

In-depth interviews were used in conjunction with any related documentation to be evaluated, such as reports, project documents, plans and data published in acknowledged websites. Findings from these instruments were thematically analysed (Creswell, 2014; Gaudet & Robert, 2018). The interviews

were conducted during the respondents' free time, and each interview lasted about 40 minutes. Questions asked focused on the chapter's priorities and objectives. Since the chapter worked with humans, the University of Fort Hare received ethical clearance application forms before the commencement of the chapter. In addition, permission was obtained from the legislature and the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Department, whose participants were part of this report. The respondents signed an informed consent form, which is part of the University of Fort Hare's ethical clearance application.

## Findings

### **Understanding women's participation, representation, and role in the legislature**

Women's representation and involvement in the provincial legislature is imperative in addressing challenges and problems affecting them. This is largely because of their involvement in the decision-making processes. Therefore, participants' understanding of women's participation, representation and role in the legislature was interrogated in this section. The views collected on this issue were divergent. This is reflected in the excerpt below, where during an interview, one respondent echoed the following sentiments:

I believe women play a crucial role in the political sphere of our country since they constitute the largest part of the population. In addition, their involvement is important in the formulation of policies that are geared towards the empowerment of women, children and the youth who are the most vulnerable in our society.

The comment above shows the integral role that women play in policy formulation and decision-making platforms. Through the participation of females in politics, other susceptible groups, such as the youth, can be represented and have their concerns heard. The above excerpt clearly demonstrates that the participants understood the connotation of females'

involvement, representation, and their role in the legislature. In addition, these results coincide with a Kivoi (2014) article that noted that fair representation and involvement of females in the process involving policymaking procedures locally is central for prioritising the realistic necessities and concerns of women in the agendas of the local governance sphere and for localising the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A gender representative and balanced local council can be an essential step in facilitating the achievement of the national gender equilibrium (Kivoi, 2014).

### **Women's participation and representation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature**

The participation and presence of females in politics has increased, though at a very slow rate, since the advent of democracy in 1994. The national legislature has recently witnessed an upsurge in the number of women MPs, with the ANC meeting its 50/50 quota related to the composition of its cabinet, where men and women are evenly represented in ministerial and deputy ministerial roles. In addition, the ANC has set a gender parity of 50/50 to be enforced in the civil service, the private sector, and the government (Mamogale & Masekela 2014). However, the same cannot be said about the provincial structures, where women are still under-represented. According to Gender Links (2019), the general representation of women in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature stands at 48%. In addition, the speaker of the legislature is a female, and the overall ANC female representation stands at 53%, which is slightly lower than the ANC target for female representation of 60% (Gender Links, 2019).

Using the critical mass theory, this chapter argues that the benefits of gender diversity in the upper echelons of organisations (including political organisations) come from a balanced gender distribution, rather than a token presence of women or a position of absolute or proportional critical mass, as found in previous empirical studies (Ararat et al., 2015). Therefore, this chapter suggests the examination of the output impact of providing a balanced gender distribution, in

addition to the mere presence of women in leadership roles and the pursuit of defining a sufficient critical mass. In essence, the number of women is important in ensuring that they are properly represented and have their voices heard. However, a gender balance is the most significant step that can be taken in ensuring gender parity and equality within the political fraternity in South Africa.

In the case of the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature, the respondents echoed the following sentiments.

The issue of women and their participation and representation within the legislature has significantly improved since the attainment of democracy in 1994. The current speaker of the legislature is a female, and this is a huge milestone achievement for the legislature and women in the Eastern Cape.

The excerpt above shows the important and crucial role that women play in politics and in addressing some of the socio-economic development challenges affecting communities in the province. Moreover, women legislators can represent other women, and this is a rare phenomenon because of the previous dominance of males in this regard. This has also seen an escalation in the total number of women elected to the legislature, resulting in the appointment of a female speaker in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature.

The chapter's results agree with research conducted by Hassim (1999:6), who noted that women's role and efficacy have extensive consequences in the definition of democratic citizenship. The disparity concerning women's inclusion within the political system raises many debates related to the citizenry status of women, who seem not to enjoy the same status as men. This is usually influenced by patriarchy that limits women's participation, including taking up leadership roles and positions in politics, because of the pertinent question of citizenship, in which women are subjected to unequal access and enjoyment of the same legal right. However, Vetten et al. (2012) argue that focusing only on formal status neglects how, through their lower

levels of involvement, women are increasingly disempowered and thus not included in key decisions about resource allocation through fiscal and social policy and legislation.

### **Political parties and women participation and representation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature**

The current Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature consists of six political parties (as shown in Table 1), namely, ANC, DA, EFF, UDM, ATM, FF Plus and MK. However, despite these numbers, the current electoral gender quotas within political parties in South Africa are in clear contrast to the critical mass theory, which pushes for increased women's political participation.

**Table 1:** Party seats in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature in 2024

| Party   | Seats | % of Votes |
|---------|-------|------------|
| ANC     | 45    | 62.16%     |
| DA      | 11    | 14.89%     |
| EFF     | 8     | 10.14%     |
| UDM     | 3     | 3.71%      |
| ATM     | 2     | 2.31%      |
| FF PLUS | 1     | 1.55%      |
| MK      | 1     | 1.44%      |

*Source: Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2024)*

Based on Table 1, the ANC has the most seats, with 45 out of 63 legislative seats in the province. It is followed by the DA, with 11, and this makes the DA the main opposition party in the Eastern Cape. Subsequently, the chapter interrogated the structure of selection of candidates to represent political parties in the legislature in relation to the incorporation and involvement of women. The findings are discussed and analysed in the section that follows.

### **Local governance, women participation, and representation in the Eastern Cape**

It is imperative for the chapter to touch on what is taking place within the local governance sphere to provide an overall picture of women's participation and representation in the political space in the Eastern Cape province. According to the United Nations (2017), women's participation in local government will make a difference, as they are willing to deal with problems that are of concern to them. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance Report (2024), with only six years to 2030 and a paltry 1% increase from 25% in 2021 to 26% in 2024, it is impossible for the majority of African countries, including South Africa, to achieve the 50% target set in SDG 5: Gender equality in relation to women's political participation and representation in legislative affairs (UNDP, n.d.). Provinces such as the Eastern Cape are also affected by the slow progress in women's participation and representation in legislative affairs. Therefore, the chapter interviewed legislatures from various jurisdictions to seek their views and opinions on the incorporation and inclusion of women in the system of local government. They echoed the following sentiments.

Women are still largely under-represented in the local governance structure. This is a cause for concern because women continue to be undermined and disempowered to influence policymaking and decision-making at that level.

One respondent noted that.

It has been difficult for women since the advent of democracy to occupy influential political positions at the local government sphere. Male patronage and the patriarchal nature of our societies have favoured male dominance in the socio-economic and political spheres. This has seen women being side-lined in political leadership roles.



The above sentiments show that women have been sidelined from political positions caused by several reasons such as patriarchy and continuous male domination within the political spectrum. Political positions continue to be viewed as the preserve of male domination. These findings correlate with research steered by the Commission on Gender Equality (2016), which notes that while stable growth has been made in making significant changes to the total of women's involvement and incorporation in governance structures and partisan politics at grassroots level, there still exist disparities in relation to the appointment and selection of women at ward level to become Councillors. Moreover, this is a worrying trend because females remain under-represented as office bearers at the level of local government (Commission for Gender Equality, 2016).

Meanwhile, the United Nations (2017), notes that the worldwide number of females nominated to local government is presently unidentified, reflecting a substantial awareness gap. Political parties subsequently function in a variety of ways as barriers to women's involvement (Franceschet, 2005:85), namely by opposing the introduction of gender quotas, women's marginalised selection, cultural traditions within the organisation and the continued monopolisation of structured politics. In the same vein, the analysis by Kivoi (2014) states that a democratic deficit arises from the lack of women's incorporation at every stage of policymaking and governance. It has been proved time and again that different communities make better choices. Such assertions are a true reflection concerning service delivery and satisfying the interests of the citizenry in local communities at the regional level of governance. Local government also influences housing, protection, transport, and economic policies, making crucial choices that impact men and women in their societies.

### **Implications of women participation and representation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature**

The enactment of policies geared towards the promotion and empowerment of women in South Africa since 1994 has paved the way for their active involvement and prioritisation

within the political domain in South Africa (Pitamber, 2016). Moreover, issues related to women's rights have been put at the forefront to fight the high prevalence of gender inequality. The government has introduced and instituted different legislative and policy frameworks aimed at promoting women's issues and addressing the gap of gender inequality that exists in the political fraternity, particularly at local governance level. These include the Gender Policy Framework of Local Government, Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality National Policy Framework, the Gender Equality Act of Commission, the Municipal Structures Act of Local Government, the Bill of Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) and the Legislation on the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination. These pieces of legislation and policy framework are reflective of the international statutes aimed at ending gender inequality while advancing women's issues such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Africa Charter on Human and People's Rights (Commission for Gender Equality, 2016).

The chapter identified four factors that are brought about by the participation and representation of women within the provincial legislature. These are namely, (i) increase in legitimacy and representativeness, (ii) good governance, (iii) equality in decision-making processes and (iv) advocating for gender equality. These findings have been analysed in line with the tenets of the social exclusion theory where women are continuously side-lined in entering and being elevated into higher echelons of leadership positions in politics because of societal norms and constraints.

### **Equality in decision-making processes**

Males control the space of political matrices, ensuring that all decision-making processes are placed in their hands. The patriarchal existence of African cultures where women are believed to make no decisions at all, strongly characterises this assumption. In addition, the traditions of many African cultures seem to refute women's central role within the political

spectrum despite their roles as homemakers, thereby limiting their promotion into leadership positions in the political fraternity. However, women can engage fairly in the decision-making processes by holding political leadership roles. During an interview, one respondent noted that:

Women are now able to participate in the decision-making processes and have a voice in issues that are deeply affecting them. Prior to their participation and representation in politics, the decision-making processes were done by their male counterparts; a sharp contrast of the ideals of democracy.

During an interview, another respondent stated that.

By being able to participate in the decision-making processes women can attain gender equality and address some of the socio-economic and political challenges adequately affecting them. They can influence some of the policies enacted by government; so, they can be able to benefit everyone especially the marginalised and vulnerable women.

The excerpts show that women have as equal a voice as men in decision-making if they are given opportunities to participate in politics. This observation is in agreement with the FWCW (1995) report, which argues that governments have continuously failed to incorporate women within the political structures to provide a leeway for their involvement in crucial decision-making processes. It seems that the reality on the ground is a sharp contrast to the continuous rhetoric and promises of promoting women to the echelons of leadership. In essence, the equivalent involvement of women in politics is key in the overall phase of women's progression. Equal participation of females in policymaking processes goes beyond the desire for democracy or simple justice but can be viewed as a crucial circumstance for considering the interests of women. The goals of equity, sustainability and peace cannot be accomplished without

women's active participation and inclusion of their experiences at all levels of decision-making (FWCW, 1995).

### **Advocating for gender equality**

It is prudent to note that women's engagement and inclusion in policymaking processes in the political arena facilitates gender equality. The inclusion of females within the domains of politics is a step in the right direction towards achieving women's empowerment and gender equality. In the political sphere, achieving gender representation encourages women to engage fully in policymaking processes at every level and to hold leadership roles. During an interview, one respondent noted that:

Since the dawn of democracy, women have been side-lined in political leadership positions as well as decision-making platforms, a firm characteristic of gender inequality. However, in recent times women are now being given the opportunities to be heard through partaking in politics and occupying leadership positions as well. One example is our current legislature in the Eastern Cape which is led by a female speaker.

On the same note, during an interview, another respondent echoed the following sentiments:

The active involvement of women in the political circles is a step in the right direction in terms gender equality and providing women with the same opportunities as their male counterparts. Women can represent the interests of other women and vulnerable groups, such as children and the youth.

The above comments reflect the importance of women's political engagement and inclusion in achieving gender equality. This result is in agreement with the OSCE/ODIHR (2014) report that argues that women are central to the political office advocacy procedure for gender equality. To achieve the essence of democratic government, empowering females of diverse

characters, upbringings and intensities of knowledge is crucial. This would ensure the presence of females in influencing policymaking on matters of concern to various women's assemblies (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014).

### **Challenges to women's participation and representation**

Most of the world's population (more than half) is made up of women who also make up the bulk of the country's population within their individual nations, their numbers exceeding those of men. Women are under-represented in many social systems, including national parliaments and provincial legislatures, despite their large population numbers. Discrimination against women in all facets of life is traditionally historical as well as political. Politically, the patriarchal culture looked at women with disdain and the conventional methods of teaching or socialising only strengthened and perpetuated male superiority to coerce, dominate and suppress women. Unrealistic patriarchal stereotypes have been developed around women because of these conventional methods of teaching. Thus, men believe in the notion of the absence and non-involvement of women in the development of a nation, particularly when trying to raise the living standards of their populations (Mamogale & Masekela, 2014).

The chapter identified some of the prominent challenges affecting the incorporation and involvement of women within the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature. These mainly include socio-cultural factors, economic factors or lack of financial resources, negative cultural perceptions and attitudes about women in leadership, violence against women in politics, lack of education and training, lack of access to knowledge and support networks and discriminatory election systems and processes.

### **Socio-cultural factors**

In many cultures, cultural variables are related to traditional expectations of women's skills and capabilities. The patriarchal paradigm, which is embedded and embraces the subsidiary and inferiority role played by women is heavily linked to cultural

factors. Stereotypes related to sex forms constitute strongly defined barriers to discrimination eradication and are thus primarily attributed to undermining gender equality (United Nations, 2001). These cultural expectations do not allow females to enthusiastically engage in politics at all. Thus, because their position is in the household with men bearing the biggest brunt of decision-making, women are encouraged to play subsidiary roles. One respondent echoed the same sentiments by stating that:

Our culture still does not recognise the key role played by women in politics and as decision-makers. The societies we live in are still deeply entrenched in labelling women as the inferior sex to men. As a result, more and more women have lost the self-confidence to participate in any activities, especially politics, in fear of victimisation and marginalisation.

The above excerpt shows that there is a lack of social and cultural transformation, which, by and large, continues to undermine the potential of women to engage in politics. This result is in agreement with a chapter conducted by Adhiambo-Oduol (2003) that recognises as chief impediments socio-cultural values, behaviours, prejudices and stereotypes. According to him, gender training and education, which women and men are subjected to from infancy, are crucial influences in promoting gender stereotypes. This has subsequently resulted in men being seen as the dominant and superior gender while the same process has subjected women to patriarchal norms and values that view them as the weaker and inferior gender.

### **Negative cultural perceptions and attitudes about women in leadership**

The equality of women in terms of political engagement is hampered by customs and practices. Only when women are politically empowered can enduring security be achieved in the fields of culture, environment, politics and economics (Harris, 2010). A country can only achieve economic growth and

development when the entire labour force, inclusive of women and men, is put to good use to achieve maximum productivity. If the same balance can also occur in the political terrain where men and women can work together in the policymaking process, the empowerment of women can be taken into full consideration (Shah et al., 2015). However, during an interview, one respondent echoed a different sentiment by noting with great concern that:

Women have always been viewed as being under the control and tutelage of men, raising questions on their ability to be leaders and occupy key political positions. This negative perception has steered some women away from participating in any political activities.

The comment above raises the question of patriarchy and how women are continuously viewed as inferior and under the control of their male counterparts. This has ultimately led to their under-representation in political offices. This result reverberates with a chapter by Bello (2013), who notes that there are multiple reasons for the limited incorporation of women in the field of politics. The diverting of females away from taking part in politics, safety concerns and the idea of the supremacy of men to be decision-makers in political-related issues has hampered the prospects of women being involved and holding political offices. The overall assumption is that women are believed to have little interest or expertise in politics, resulting in their absence.

Several recommendations were made from the research for women, local governance systems, provincial legislature, national legislature, and government to intensify females' participation and depiction within the party-political structures, which in turn has socio-economic and political advantages, growth, and peacekeeping. To establish approaches which incorporate the advancement of societies and women residing in rural areas, policies involving empowering provincial legislatures, local government, and communities are required. The guidelines would also help to draw on the opportunities and advantages of women's engagement and inclusion in the

betterment of the way of other women and deprived groups in the form of children and young people, as well as improving the relations amongst men and women. These are some of the guidelines that the chapter makes:

### **Economic and financial support**

There is a need to provide women with economic and financial resources and help to ensure their active involvement and participation in politics. In turn, this would ensure that females are not unduly confronted with sexism, manipulation and deprivation and that senior and leadership roles can be taken up. There is also a need to encourage further improvements and make inroads in ensuring that women take up spaces in the socio-economic and political spheres, pleas for the effective, full and equal use by all human beings of human, financial, material and information resources. In addition, the provincial legislature, municipal governance, and government need to ensure equitable rights to use natural resources, economic resources, and land, particularly in the context of rural women.

### **Education and training**

The lack of knowledge and preparation is an obstacle to women's involvement and representation in politics. Education, training, mentorship and seminars should, therefore, be carried out to train and increase women's awareness of political issues and the benefits of their active participation in this field. In addition, national consultations, regional discussions, and symposiums pertaining to the involvement of females in the political sphere should be conducted to take account of the prospects and challenges confronting women and to recognise mitigation strategies that can increase the contribution of women. In levitation mindfulness and promoting the development of women's agenda through addressing gender inequalities, the formulation of gender policies at the provincial level would be far-reaching.



### **Access to information and supportive networks**

One prudent prerequisite for the political commitment of women is access to information and supportive networks, and their absence is detrimental not only to women but also to society. To ensure that women are made aware of the vital position that they play in the political sphere, mentoring and grooming training and workshops are required. Moreover, to inspire other women to engage in politics, the sharing of knowledge is important.

### **Cultural and social transformation**

Women are subject to heavy prejudice based on deeply ingrained beliefs and traditions of patriarchy. There is a common belief in patriarchal cultures that there should be minimal visibility and involvement of women in public spaces and that, by their very nature, women do not possess any leadership qualities to take up positions in the political domain. There is a need for cultural and social change to take place to overcome these values to address this problem. It is difficult to understand these intangible informal institutional principles, norms, frameworks, and procedures, and they frequently represent a greater obstacle than formal laws. For women to benefit, there is a need for a transformation and total overhaul of values and norms associated with patriarchy for women's views and perspectives to be heard. This will go a long way in paving a platform for them to take up leadership positions, including political ones. Moreover, women in these positions can bring significant changes through their active involvement in decision-making processes by questioning the status quo that undermines their value and role in the socio-economic development transformation of communities.

### **Conclusion**

In decision-making and electoral politics, women have been excluded for a long time. Therefore, most women are deprived of information on electoral arrangements and politics, as well as tools for running successful campaigns. Cultural and

social features, political violence, an absence of education and prospects, and patriarchal perceptions that seem to be greater in rural areas as compared to urban areas are significant hindrances to women gaining admission to political decision-making, participation, and representation in the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature. The chapter also notes that the incorporation participation and representation of women at the local level, or the lack thereof, has a direct influence on participation and representation at the legislative and national levels. The political party's commitment to gender equality and gender parity at the provincial level is also important. In addition, more gender attentiveness and sensitisation interventions, supplemented by females' liberation, are required to permit men and women to clarify the perceptions surrounding the role of women in decision-making.

## References

- Adhiambo-Odual, J. (2003). The women in the new political dispensation: A false start in challenges and opportunities. *Journal of the Institute of Certified Public Secretaries of Kenya, Nairobi*.
- African National Congress (ANC), 2012. *Gender Equality and Women's Representation in Parliament*. [online] ANC Website. Available at: <https://www.anc1912.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ANC-4th-National-Policy-Conference-Gender-Paper.pdf> [Accessed 15 August 2025].
- Ararat, M., Aksu, M. & Cetin, A. T. (2015). How board diversity affects firm performance in emerging markets: Evidence on channels in controlled firms. *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, 23(2015), 83–103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/corg.12103>
- Bello, M. (2013). *Challenges to Women Participation in Electoral Politics in Nigeria*. Postgraduate Student of International Relations, Zirve University.
- Brynard, D., Hanekom, S. & Brynard, P. (2014). *Introduction to research*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Pretoria: Van Schaik.

- Commission for Gender Equality (CGE). (2016). *Giving with One Hand, Taking with the other: Women's Representation in South Africa's 2016 Municipal Elections*. CGE. [Online]. Available at: <https://cge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/giving-with-one-hand-taking-with-the-other.pdf> [Accessed: 11 November 2019].
- Creswell, J. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. & Plano Clark, V. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denscombe, M. (2014) *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) Berkshire: Open University Press.
- De Vos, A. S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C. B. & Delport, C. S. L. (2018). *Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- DiLanzo, T. (2018). *Strengthen Girls' and Women's Political Participation and Decision-Making Power: Facts, Solutions, Case Studies, and Calls to Action*. Women Deliver. [Online]. Available at: [https://womendeliver.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2019-8-D4G\\_Brief\\_Political.pdf](https://womendeliver.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2019-8-D4G_Brief_Political.pdf) [Accessed: 29 June 2019].
- Eflova, M., Riyaz M., Guzel I. & Kazan R. (2017). Conceptualisation of social exclusion phenomena in sociological theories. *Turkish Online Journal of Design Art and Communication*, 7(2017), 1887–1892.
- Fleming, S. (2019). South Africa's Cabinet is now 50% women for the first time ever. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2019/06/south-africa-s-cabinet-is-now-50-women-for-the-first-time-ever/> [Accessed: 13 May 2020].
- Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW). (1995). *Draft Platform for Action*. Beijing, September.
- Franceschet, S. (2005) *Women and politics in Chile*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781626371613>
- Gaudet, S. & Robert, D. (2018). *A journey through qualitative research: From design to reporting*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529716733>

- Grey, S. (2006). Numbers and beyond: The relevance of critical mass in gender research. *Politics and Gender*, 2(04), 492–502. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X06221147>
- Gender Links. (2019). *Beyond Numbers: Gender Audit of the May 2019 South African Elections*. Available at: <https://genderlinks.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/GENDER-IN-2019-SA-ELECTIONS-LR.pdf> [Accessed: 7 November 2019].
- Goldblatt, B. (2014) Testing women’s right to social security in Australia: A poor score. In: Goldblatt, B. and Lamarche, L. (eds.) *Women’s rights to social security and social protection*. Oxford: Hart Publishing
- Gouws, A. (2011). Women’s representation in government: Quotas, substantive equality and self-interested politicians. *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, 77(2011), 70–89. <https://doi.org/10.1353/trn.2011.0039>
- Guba E. G. & Yvonna, L. S. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Harris, A. (2010). Mind the gap: Attitudes and emergent feminist politics since the third wave. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 25(66), 475–484. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2010.520684>
- Hassim, S. (1999). From presence to power: Women’s citizenship in a new democracy. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 40, 6–17. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4066012>
- Hicks, J., Morna, L. C. & Fonnah, M. (2016). *Gender in the 2016 South African Local Government Elections*. Gender Links. [Online]. Available at: [https://genderlinks.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Gender-and-Local-elections-2016-ReportFINAL\\_jhmfcml\\_092016f.pdf](https://genderlinks.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Gender-and-Local-elections-2016-ReportFINAL_jhmfcml_092016f.pdf) [Accessed: 28 May 2019].
- Hills, J. (2015). Addressing gender quotas in South Africa: Women empowerment and gender equality legislation. *Deakin Law Review*, 20(1), 153–184. <https://doi.org/10.21153/dlr2015vol20no1art498>
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). (2013). *Political Parties in Africa through a Gender Lens*. Stockholm, Sweden.
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. (2024). *Africa Barometer*. Stockholm, Sweden.

- Kivoi, D. L. (2014). Factors impeding political participation and representation of women in Kenya. *Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(6), 173–181. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.hss.20140206.15>
- Liu, Q., Liu, L., Ma, F. and Lv, X. (2018). *Opinion on the Post-modernism*. Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Humanities (ICCESSH 2018), pp: 890–893. Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/iccessh-18.2018.204>
- Mamogale, M. J. & Masekela, K. L. (2014). Women in politics: Participation and representation in the South African legislatures. *Journal of the South African Legislative Sector*, 1(1), 49–63.
- Musau, Z. (2019). African Women in Politics: Miles to go before parity is achieved. *Decade of Action Short Stories*. Available at: <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/april-2019-july-2019/african-women-politics-miles-go-parity-achieved>. [Accessed: 13 May 2020].
- National Democratic Institute (2015) *Why women in politics*. Available at: <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Handout%20%20-%20Why%20Women%20in%20Politics.doc> (Accessed: 28 May 2019).
- Nhundu, K. R. (2013). *Political Parties in Africa through a Gender Lens*. Stockholm, Sweden: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.
- Newman, D. A. (2014). Missing data. *Organisational Research Methods*, 17(4), 372–411. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428114548590>
- OSCE/ODIHR. (2014). *Handbook on promoting women's participation in political parties*. [Online]. Available at: <https://tandis.odihr.pl/bitstream/20.500.12389/21946/1/08116.pdf>. [Accessed: 7 November 2019].
- Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2024) *Eastern Cape legislature*. Available at: <https://pmg.org.za/provincial-legislatures/eastern-cape/> [Accessed: 8 November 2024].
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Pitamber, P. (2016). *South Africa's women in politics*. Brand South Africa. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.brandsouthafrica.com/governance/developmentnews/south-africa-s-women-in-politics> [Accessed: 7 November 2019].
- Rosen, J. (2017). Gender quotas for women in national politics: A comparative analysis across development thresholds. *Social Science Research*, 66(2017), 82–101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2017.01.008>
- Sadie, Y. (2014). Gender policy and legislation during the first 20 years of democracy. *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 36(2), 111–125. <https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v36i2.172>
- Shah, I. A., Aziz, A. & Ahmad, M, S. (2015). Women councillors for women's empowerment in Pakistan. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(3), 203–219.
- Silver, H. (2017). *The Process of Social Exclusion: The Dynamics of an Evolving Concept*. Chronic Poverty Research Centre Working Paper No. 95, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1629282> or <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1629282>
- Stanus, C. (2016). Political representation and governance: The case of second-tier councillors in Romania. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 48(2016), 124–144.
- Statistics South Africa (Stats SA). (2016). *Millennium Development Goals 3: Promote gender equality and empower women 2015*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.
- Statistics South Africa (Stats SA). (2024). *2024 mid-year population estimates: female 32.13 million (51%), male 30.89 million (49%)*. [online] Available at: <https://sls-fresco.momentum.co.za/files/documents/invest/updates-and-news/economic-and-investment-updates/2024-mid-year-population-estimates-chartbook.pdf> [Accessed 15 August 2025].
- Times Live. (2019). *Cyril Ramaphosa's new cabinet in his own words*. Times Live, 29 May 2019. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2019-05-29-in-full-cyril-ramaphosas-new-cabinet-in-his-own-words/> [Accessed: 30 May 2019].

## Chapter Five

- United Nations (UN). (1995). *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. UN. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.
- United Nations (2017) *UN Women annual report 2016–2017*. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2017/UN-Women-Annual-Report-2016-2017-en.pdf> (Accessed: [insert date]).
- United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality. (2001). Available at: from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/Chapter3.htm>. [Accessed: 4 May 2020].
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (n.d.). Sustainable Development Goals. UNDP. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2018). *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update*. New York: UNDP. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-indices-indicators-2018-statistical-update> [Accessed 15 August 2025].
- Vetten, L., Makhunga, L. & Leisegang, A. (2012). *Making Women's Representation in Parliament Count: The Case of Violence Against Women*. Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre to End Violence against Women. [Online]. Available at: [https://shukumisa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Making\\_Womens\\_Representation\\_count.pdf](https://shukumisa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Making_Womens_Representation_count.pdf) [Accessed: 7 November 2019].
- Vetten, L. (2016). *Political Representation makes Women's Voices heard? Lessons from South Africa*. Feminist Dialogue Series, 4, Mozambican Feminist Platform Forum Mulher and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). Available from: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/mosambik/13101.pdf>







## Chapter Six

# The Gender Equality Bill, Political Chauvinism and the Quality of Women's Representation in Nigerian Politics

**Omosefe Oyekanmi** 

*Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation (IPATC)  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa*

**Kafilah Gold** 

*DSI/NRF South African Research Chair in Industrial  
Development, College of Business and Economics  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa*

**Antonia Taiye Simbine** 

*Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER)   
Ibadan, Nigeria*

### Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's largest economy and population, ranks amongst the lowest in development indexes, with a persistent gender gap in political representation. Considering the under-representation of women in Nigeria, evident across the three arms of government, this chapter assesses women's representation along with political chauvinism and the Gender Equality Bills (GEBs) introduced in 2021. The low participation or representation of women in politics not only contradicts accepted principles of equality of rights, based on the principles of states being 'self-determined units' or those of democracy

and state sovereignty, but undermines the quality of democracy and legitimacy of a political system (Goyal, 2023).

Nigeria has traversed a complex path marked by political upheavals, economic fluctuations, and social transformations since her independence in 1960. Within this combustible mix, women's action and inaction in politics has been significant, accounting for the numerous scholarly debates on increasing women's participation and advocacies for gender equality bills as a recourse (Jiang et al., 2023). Constituting 49.95% out of 206 million, women account for a significant portion of the Nigerian population. Despite their numbers and considerable strides, they have continued to record low participation in politics, an enduring trend that reflects a gender-blind approach of successive administrations in Nigeria.

Since Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, after 29 years of military reign, women's inclusion in politics has gradually improved, but not significant enough to alter the present status quo of under-representation and its impact of marginalisation on women's lives and livelihood. Essentially, low women's political participation in Nigeria perpetuates adverse conditions that limit women's ability to influence policy and advocate for gender-sensitive reforms (Nosiri et al., 2022). Beginning with elective positions, Nigeria's female representation in parliament is lowest in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (PLAC, 2024). From 1999 to the last general elections in 2023, women in elective and appointive positions remained less than 10%. In the 1999 general elections, only three women out of 109 seats were elected to the Senate, and 12 women out of 360 seats were elected to the House of Representatives. At the state level, the number of women in the State Houses of Assembly was also low, with only about 12 women out of 990 members nationwide. Women's participation at the local government level was even more minimal, with very few women elected to local councils.

Over the subsequent election years, there were incremental increases in women's representation, but progress has been slow. For instance, in the 2003 elections, the number of women

in the Senate increased to 4, while the House of Representatives saw a slight rise to 21 women. By 2015, there were 7 women in the Senate and 22 in the House of Representatives. Despite these gains, women's representation still falls short of gender parity. State and local levels have seen similar trends, with some states making more significant strides than others. Though continuous efforts to enhance women's political participation are increasing, driven by advocacy from women's rights organisations and supportive policies, the pace is, however, slow when compared to the wide gender gap.

As of the last general elections in 2023, women hold less than 7% of the seats in the National Assembly, a figure notably lower than the regional and global averages of 23.4% for Africa and 15% for West Africa. Hence, women are occupying only 3% of seats in the Senate and 4% in the House of Representatives. This signifies that women's representation dropped to 2.7% and 4.7% in the Senate and House of Representatives, respectively (PLAC, 2024). Within the judiciary's ranks, the representation of women is starkly limited. Out of 17 Justices in the Supreme Court, only 5 are women. Similarly, women constitute just 22 out of 84 judges in the Court of Appeal and only 26 out of 74 judges in the Federal High Courts (Oyekanmi, 2021). At the national level, there are only 7 women out of the 39 appointed Federal ministers. In contrast, at the State level, no woman has emerged as governor through elections, and at the local government level, less than 10% of councillors are women (See Table 1 and Figure 1).

Within the educational system, the literacy rate for females within the 15 to 24 age range is approximately 59%, while the rate for males in the same age group is 70% (World Bank, 2024). Also, only about 52% of adult females (15 years and older) are literate, compared to roughly 71% of adult males (World Population Review, 2024). Sadly, Nigeria has one of the highest rates of out-of-school children (5 to 14 years) in the world (20 million), with girls constituting a sizeable percentage of that number (Alabi, 2022). The situation in the northern part of the country is even worse, where at least, one in three children, mostly girls, are out of school (UKFIET, 2023).

**Table 1:** Female Representation in Selected Elective and Appointive Positions (1999–2023)

| Year | Office                   | 1999 |              | 2003 |               | 2007 |               | 2011 |               | 2015 |               | 2019 |               | 2023 |               |
|------|--------------------------|------|--------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|
|      |                          | Seat | Women        | Seat | Women         | Seat | Women         | Seat | Women         | Seat | Women         | Seat | Women         | Seat | Women         |
|      | President                | 1    | 0            | 1    | 0             | 1    | 0             | 1    | 0             | 1    | 0             | 1    | 0             | 1    | 0             |
|      | Vice President           | 0    | 0            | 0    | 0             | 0    | 0             | 0    | 0             | 0    | 0             | 1    | 0             | 1    | 0             |
|      | Senate                   | 109  | 3<br>(2.8%)  | 109  | 3<br>(2.27%)  | 109  | 9<br>(8.26%)  | 109  | 7<br>(6.4%)   | 109  | 7<br>(6.4%)   | 109  | 8<br>(7.3%)   | 109  | 3<br>(2.7%)   |
|      | House of Reps.           | 360  | 12<br>(3.3%) | 360  | 21<br>(5.83%) | 360  | 25<br>(6.98%) | 360  | 26<br>(7.2%)  | 360  | 22<br>(6.11%) | 360  | 13<br>(3.6%)  | 360  | 17<br>(4.7%)  |
|      | Governor                 | 36   | 0            | 36   | 0             | 36   | 0             | 36   | 0             | 36   | 0             | 36   | 0             | 36   | 0             |
|      | Deputy Governor          | 36   | 1            | 36   | 2             | 36   | 6             | 36   | 1             | 36   | –             | 36   | 4             | 36   | 8             |
|      | State Houses of Assembly | 990  | 24<br>(2.4%) | 990  | 38<br>(3.84%) | 990  | 54<br>(5.45%) | 990  | 68<br>(6.9%)  | 990  | –             | 990  | 44<br>(4.41%) | 990  | 48<br>(4.85%) |
|      | Ministers                | 47   | 9<br>(19.1%) | 33   | 5<br>(15.1%)  | 39   | 7<br>(17.9%)  | 41   | 13<br>(31.7%) | 36   | 6<br>(16.6%)  | 44   | 7<br>(15.9%)  | 28   | 7<br>(25%)    |

Source: Authors' Compilation

Number of Men and Women in the Federal Legislature, Executive and Judiciary, 2023

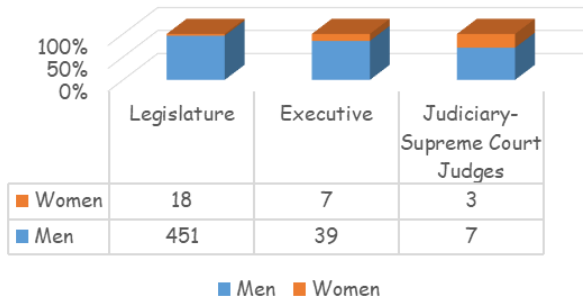


**Figure 1:** Number of Men and Women in the Federal Legislature, Executive and Judiciary, 2023. Source: Dataphyte, 2024

With a higher illiteracy rate compared to men, women are more vulnerable to girl-child marriage and a higher rate of gender-based violence. Accounting for 40% of all child brides in the region, Nigeria has the highest number of child brides in Africa, with over 22 million girls and women married off as youngsters and 44% of girls becoming married before reaching 18 years old (UNICEF, 2018). Nigeria accounts for the third highest number of women and girls worldwide who have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM), with high prevalence amongst girls between ages 0 to 14. Generally, 86% of females in Nigeria were cut before age 5, while 8% were cut between ages 5 and 14 (UNICEF, 2022).

The situation is no different in healthcare, where for every 100,000 live births, there are about 512 maternal fatalities. In addition, the adolescent birth rate is high, with about 106 births per 1,000 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 (World Bank, 2024). Consequently, the under-five mortality rate (U5MR) is 102 per 1,000 live births, a notable figure still far from the SDG target of 25 per 1,000 live births. One third of these deaths (34 per 1,000 live births) occur within the first 28 days of life (UNICEF, 2022).

The score card for women in economic participation is equally low. According to the World Bank as at 2020, women earn approximately 77% of what men earn for similar work, reflecting a significant wage gap. More so, only 52.2% of the working-age female population is actively participating in the labour force, compared to 65.9% for males for 2023. Data compiled between 2016 and 2024 on the share of female business owners stood at 34% compared to male business owners at 66% for Nigeria, which shows that women continue to face systemic barriers (World Bank, 2024). This, as the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) avers, is factored by occupational segregation and fewer opportunities for advancement, even when women own about 40% of SMEs (small and medium enterprises) in the country.

Hence, corroborating Álvarez et al.'s (2023) assertion, perspectives on gender extend beyond addressing women's issues, as it also provides a framework for understanding the organisation of society across various spheres like education, health and socio-economic sectors from a fresh perspective.

To this end, qualitative data were gathered through secondary sources. These data were analysed using content and discourse analysis.

### **The Gender Equality Bill**

The Gender Equality Bill, formally known as the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, is a legislative proposal that has undergone multiple readings and rejections over the past several years. It was first introduced into Nigeria's political lexicon in 2006, under the National Gender Policy of 2006, which laid the groundwork for subsequent legislative efforts to formalise gender equality. Following efforts to achieve the 2015 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 in Nigeria, the Bill resurfaced in 2010, particularly emphasising improving gender parity as a key development goal. However, despite the ambitious goals, the Bill faced significant challenges in the legislative process. The Bill was promoted by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, with the

backing of numerous regional and global organisations. The goal of the Bill was to domesticate international treaties and conventions that focused on gender, specifically the African Union protocol on women's rights in Africa and the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

The Bill was introduced in the Nigerian Senate for the first time in March 2016 by Senator Biodun Olujimi, and a vote was held to decide whether or not it should be approved and become law. After deliberations, the Bill was rejected on 15 March 2016, on the basis that it contained a number of provisions that were incompatible with the religious and cultural views of the majority of Nigerians, making it unfit to become law (Kazeem, 2016). The Bill was again introduced in September 2016, and was rejected for the second time. Those opposed to it claimed that it went against Nigerian tradition and Islamic beliefs, especially Muslim Senators from the North (Payton, 2016).

Five years later, Senator Olujimi revived the Bill in March 2021 and presented it. However, the Bill was not successful, giving similar defences of cultural and religious values.

In December 2022, the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill was reintroduced in the Nigerian Senate. This time, the scope of this version of the Bill was broadened regarding other general gender-related concerns, such as discrimination and gender-based violence. This reintroduction reflected a holistic approach to the urgent concerns and was intended to be in line with local and international advocacy efforts for gender equality and women's rights.

Fortunately, the Bill made it to its second reading in the Senate on 31 May 2023. This accomplishment was a major advancement showing that, in spite of earlier obstacles, some legislators are committed to advancing gender equality. Consequently, the debate on the Bill shifted more towards how gender legal frameworks could guarantee equal gender opportunities in work, education as well as protecting people from gender-based violence.

Although the Bill eventually passed the second reading at the Senate, it is yet to pass the committee stage, where it will be thoroughly examined before a final vote and a third reading. If approved, it will go to the House of Representatives for ratification before ending up with the President. In any case, the advancement of the Bill is indicative of the growing awareness of the need to combat gender discrimination and advance equitable opportunities for all Nigerians as a way of solidifying democracy.

### **Implications of the GEB on Women's Quality Representation**

Despite facing significant obstacles, primarily from sociocultural and religious factors, the upcoming months into the new political dispensation of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, will be instructive as the Gender Equality Bill undergoes further scrutiny and debate in the legislative process.

Essentially, the proposed legislation seeks to implement Section 42 of the Nigerian Constitution, which prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including gender. It addresses issues such as land ownership, inheritance rights, education, employment, and the rising tide of gender-based violence.

#### **Specifically, the Bill has five propositions:**

##### *1. Special Seats for Women*

This sought to amend Sections 48, 49, 71, 77 and 117 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) to create special seats for women in the Senate, House of Representatives, and State Houses of Assembly as a temporary special measure aimed at enhancing and encouraging women's participation and representation in politics.

**Key Provisions** of Sections 48, 49, 71, 77 and 117 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended)



- Section 48: This section specifies the composition of the Senate, the upper house of the National Assembly. It outlines the representation from each state and the Federal Capital Territory, ensuring equal representation across the states.
- Section 49: This section details the composition of the House of Representatives, the lower house of the National Assembly. It provides the basis for the number of representatives, which the population of each state and the Federal Capital Territory determines.
- Section 71: This section grants the National Assembly the power to establish constituencies. It describes how the boundaries of these constituencies should be determined, ensuring fair and adequate representation of the population.
- Section 77: This section outlines the electoral process for members of the National Assembly. It mandates that elections should be conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and should follow the principles of democratic elections.
- Section 117: This section pertains to the election of members to the House of Assembly of each state. It specifies that these elections should be conducted following the regulations set forth by the INEC.

Thus, the creation of special seats for women through a possible amendment of these sections of the 1999 Constitution is to collectively ensure a fair, representative, and democratic process for the election of legislative members in Nigeria. This is premised on the fact that under-representation affects the formulation and implementation of policies that address women's needs and priorities, as highlighted above. The Bill aims to rectify this by advocating for affirmative action policies that would ensure a minimum quota for women in political positions.

## *2. Expansion of the Scope of Citizenship by Registration*

This Bill seeks to improve Section 26 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) to allow the foreign male spouses of Nigerian women to acquire citizenship by registration. Presently, the

key provision of this section only allows foreign female spouses to Nigerian males to [obtain citizenship by registration](#). In effect, any woman who is or has been married to a citizen of Nigeria can apply for registration as a Nigerian citizen. This change would promote quality representation of women by ensuring that Nigerian women and men have the same rights to confer citizenship on their foreign spouses. Additionally, it would strengthen family unity and stability, as spouses would no longer face legal and bureaucratic hurdles based on gender. Ensuring their equal rights and status within the legal framework empowers more women to participate fully and confidently in civic and political spaces. Overall, this proposed Bill represents a significant step towards eliminating gender discrimination in Nigerian citizenship laws and fostering a more inclusive society.

### 3. *Affirmative Action for Women in Political Party Administration*

This sought to amend Section 223 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) to provide for affirmative action in favour of women in political party administration by prescribing that at least 35% of party executives are women. This amendment seeks to address the gender imbalance in political leadership roles and ensure that women's voices and perspectives are adequately represented in the decision-making processes within political parties. By guaranteeing a minimum level of female representation in party leadership, the amendment would ensure that women's interests and issues are more likely to be considered and prioritised in party agendas and policies.

### 4. *Indigeneship Rights*

It seeks to amend Sections 31 and 318 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) to prescribe the criteria for qualification to become an indigene of a state in Nigeria. It prescribed that a woman married to an indigen of a state different from her state of origin for at least five years should be deemed to be an indigen of that state and therefore is entitled to all rights and privileges such as employment, appointment or election into any political or public office. Sections 31 and 318 of the

1999 Constitution address the qualifications and criteria for citizenship and indigeneship but lack specific provisions regarding the status of women married across state lines. This amendment is a significant legal development, providing a clear and equitable pathway for women to gain indigeneship status through marriage. This provision proposes that married women are not disadvantaged by their marital status and can fully integrate into their spouses' communities. Access to state-specific rights and privileges, such as employment and public office, promotes women's social and economic integration into their new communities. This enhances their ability to contribute to local governance and development, reflecting their unique perspectives and needs. When vying for political office, many women have had conflicts of interest about their state of origin and marriage of origin. For instance, the political career of Aisha Alhassan, popularly known as Mama Taraba, who is originally from Kaduna state but married to a man in Taraba state, was complicated by the perception that, as a woman married in Taraba, she may not fully represent the indigeneity required for political leadership in the state.

#### 5. *Affirmative Action*

This sought to amend Section 147 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) to ensure the appointment of not less than 10% of women as Ministers and Commissioners in the Federal and State Executive Council to guarantee the inclusion of women in governance. Section 147 of the 1999 Constitution currently outlines the process for appointing Ministers and Commissioners but does not specify gender quotas. The proposed amendment seeks to rectify this by explicitly requiring a minimum representation of women in these key executive positions. By embedding this requirement in the Constitution, the amendment provides a strong legal framework for advancing gender equality in Nigeria's political landscape. Women in executive positions are better positioned to advocate for and implement policies that promote gender equality and women's rights. Their involvement can lead to the development of more gender-sensitive policies, addressing issues such as maternal

health, education for girls, and protection against gender-based violence.

In other words, the implications of the proposed GEB on ensuring quality representation from women hinges on four key areas. They include ensuring equal opportunities for men and women in all spheres of life; eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and girls; promoting gender mainstreaming in policymaking and implementation; and enhancing the participation of women in political and public life

These implications are a given, because democracy is characterised by the inclusion and participation of all citizens. Therefore, gender equality and the quality of its representation transcend women or men. The exclusion of women from political and economic processes limits the diversity of perspectives and solutions available to address our national challenges.

### **Conceptualising Political Chauvinism and the GEB**

The phenomenon of political chauvinism, which expresses itself in status subordination and marginalisation, has become common within Nigerian politics. Women's participation in Nigerian politics has been attributed to systemic problems and cultural background, which creates a male chauvinistic environment characterised by an adverse disposition to leadership in the community, political arena, religion, or any other public activity. Political and social theories explore different dimensions of chauvinism, often tracing the term to nationalism and patriotism (Gustavsson & Stendahl, 2020). Political chauvinism is a gendered ideology with societal expectations, as well as a cultural construct, stipulating subordinate status for women and citizens that identify with women's causes (Rudnyckyj & Whittington, 2020).

Political chauvinism extends sexism out of the private confines into the public spectrum by attacking women's gains in politics. It targets women, political parties, and feminist organisations that decide to challenge the segregation of competencies in political life (Čičkarić, 2024). Although present in societies and homogenised within conservative and religious

groups that oppose sexual liberation, political chauvinism seeks not only to reduce current women's political role but also to prevent public access for women or men collaborating with feminist causes.

Within the context of Nigeria's political landscape, political chauvinism has influenced women's political participation, particularly concerning the formulation and implementation of the GEB. These chauvinistic tendencies create three main barriers that limit the quality of women's representation in Nigeria. They include:

### **1. Cultural and Religious Practices**

Nigeria's patriarchal society and religiously diverse landscape often view politics as a male domain, discouraging women from aspiring to political roles and public leadership. According to the cultural determinism theory, culture is critical in shaping a country's gender roles and development (Oyekanmi & Pogoson, 2021; Gambaro et al., 2023). The foundation of cultural and religious belief in Nigeria permeates the subjugation of women across all spheres of society, including politics. Hence, Nigeria is based on traditional beliefs and social values, which dictate that women should prioritise domestic responsibilities over public life. These societal expectations create significant psychological barriers for women who wish to enter politics, making it difficult for them to gain support from their families and communities (Ajibade et al., 2021).

This is the case with the GEB, which passed a second reading at the Nigerian Senate after numerous rejections since 2016. Amongst the reasons for its rejection by most members of the parliament were their notion of religious injunctions of the holy books on women and leadership and the domination of men, who make up over 90% of the parliament. Even though some technical issues, such as the use of 'equality' in the Bill instead of 'equity', which most of the legislators preferred, as contained in the Bill, were raised, deep-rooted cultural and traditional norms continually inhibited the passage of the Bill. The opposition against the Bill continues to manifest

in various forms, such as lobbying against the Bill, spreading misinformation, and employing political tactics to delay or block its passage. For instance, in 2019, Mr Yusuf and Mr Wamakko, two of the Senators (Taraba Central Senatorial and Sokoto North Senatorial districts), opposed the Bill, saying that its provisions were against the socio-cultural practice of Islam. They argued further that by equating opportunities for women and men, the Bill infringes on the provisions of the Quran and the Bible. With emphasis on removing the word “equal” (Iroanusi, 2021), they suggested that a Bill bearing the Gender Equity Bill would be better accepted.

The political opposition to the GEB amongst the Nigerian political class and others stems from misperceptions of the provisions of the Bill as well as its intention. Arguments against the Bill, for the most part, tend to rest on the fundamental misunderstanding or ignorance of its provisions. Another male senator claimed that ‘we should not give women too much opportunity. They will come here, and one day you will find all these women in this chamber, and they will mess up’ (Ette & Akpan-Obong, 2023). Furthermore, the majority of the presentations from policymakers and civil society alike, as well as media commentaries and editorials from 2016, tended to focus almost exclusively on the controversial provision of the Bill calling for a 35% affirmative action for women. While some commentators did not explicitly query the necessity of affirmative action in Nigeria, practically all of them took issue with the exclusive nature of the affirmative action that is called for in the GEB.

Thus, political chauvinism has manifested through cultural, social and religious practices significantly hampering the passage of the Gender Equality Bill, despite its propensity to enhance the quality of women’s representation. Intuitively, considering that most Nigerian parliamentarians are products of a patriarchal society where men traditionally hold positions of power and authority, these male-dominated leadership structures extend to political institutions, where male parliamentarians may view gender equality bills as a threat to their established dominance.

Similarly, the power structures within the Nigerian parliament further impede the passage of the GEB. In effect, assenting to any bill requires broad political support, which is a simple majority of the Senators present and voting or a quorum of at least one-third of the entire membership of the Senate. Until 2021, the GEB did not scale through the second reading and is yet to pass through the third reading, implying the low support for a bill that will strengthen the quality of women's representation in politics and Nigeria's development in the long run. Therefore, cultural and religious beliefs manifested through political chauvinism within Nigerian society created substantial barriers to legislative progress on gender equality.

## **2. Economic Considerations**

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty in Nigeria, accounting for over 60% of the poorest individuals in Nigeria, with approximately 52 million women living in extreme poverty (Jerumeh, 2024). Compared to men, they are economically disadvantaged, thereby enabling political chauvinism as an enduring weapon to limit their access to quality life and livelihood. Often exacerbated by systemic issues such as unequal pay and the high prevalence of informal employment, these economic constraints further hamper not only their participation in politics but also their quality. Women's economic marginalisation creates an imbalance in the power structure, with men dominating the financial resources and influencing the decision-making processes. For instance, propositions 2 and 4 of the GEB, respectively ([Expansion of the Scope of Citizenship by Registration and Indigeneship Rights](#)) seek to address the limits to women's economic power, which restricts their ability to own property, access financial resources, and fully participate in economic activities and opportunities, in regions where they are not considered indigenes.

As highlighted in the introductory section of this chapter, women's access to education, quality health, etc., is poor compared to their male counterparts. Consequently, their political agency is restricted, given that they have fewer resources to engage in political activities and effect substantial

change actively. In other words, this results in fewer women holding influential positions, which translates to lower political influence, representation and impact on women.

By extension, the economic limitations which manifest in poverty and economic dependence exacerbate the male chauvinist political system by reinforcing traditional gender roles and norms. Thus, women's voices are often excluded from political debates and decision-making bodies, reinforcing male-dominated governance structures.

### **3. Political Parties**

Political parties, which are the vehicle of democracy, have been a key enabler of political chauvinism, significantly affecting the quality of women's political representation in Nigeria. Even though women have been very active in voting, constituting about 51% of the voters in the last general elections, they continue to be under-represented in elective and appointive positions. Proposition three of the GEB, seeking for affirmative action of at least 35% of party executives for women in political party administration seeks to address this, given the present imbalance of gender candidacy within political parties.

Examining the number of female parliamentarians, who must navigate their political parties' internal processes to emerge, highlights the disparities in women's representation within these parties. Using the 2019 election, Nigeria had the lowest women's representation in upper and lower chambers across several African countries, despite women's high voting turn out (Dan-Azumi & Asan, 2021), while between 1999 and 2024 the cumulative percentage of women in parliament compared to men is 6% to 94%



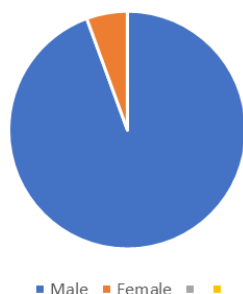
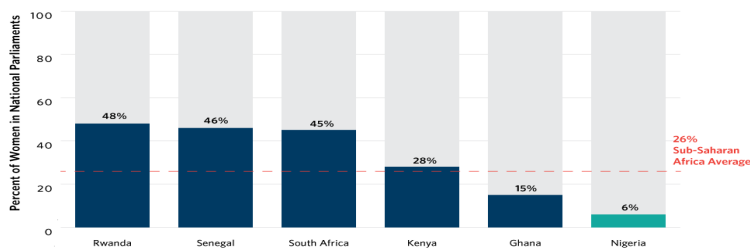


**Figure 2:** Percentage of Male and Female Parliamentarians Between 1999 and 2024. Source: Author’s conceptualisation.

Nigeria’s political arena is heavily dominated by men, with patriarchal attitudes and discriminatory practices limiting quality participation from women. Political parties and structures often marginalise women, providing them with fewer opportunities to contest for leadership positions and often relegating them to less influential roles. This political marginalisation is not only reflected in the low number of women holding elected offices but also in the poor performances of some of the few women holding office, who seek to remain loyal to their male benefactors who brought them into office.

**Figure 1. Women’s Representation in National Parliaments in Select African Countries**



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 2023.  
Note: Data for Nigeria is based on the 2019 elections results.

**Figure 3:** Women’s Representation in National Parliaments in Selected African Countries

The political party system in Nigeria has been male-dominated, with institutions shaped to promote and sustain their dominance. As far back as the 1950s, when independent political parties were formed, the three major parties, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), and the Action Group (AG), were created without structural consideration for women. Though some women like Margaret Ekpo, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, and Mrs Awolowo. Etc. demonstrated quality women's representation, still felt to this day, women were generally under-represented in political activities during this period because of societal norms and restrictions. This ongoing trend of political chauvinism against women lingered into the 2023 elections, highlighting the continued challenge of achieving gender parity in political representation. In the 2023 elections, there were 15,307 candidates contending for various political positions across the 18 registered political parties. However, women accounted for only 9.8% of the total number of candidates, with only a meagre 5.2% of the total women who contested winning their election (Lemo, 2023).

Fundamentally, the reality of women's political representation negates the constitution and manifests guiding political parties and the Independent National Electoral Body (INEC) since 1999. This is stipulated in Articles 1 and 2 of INEC's regulations on political party respectively, stating thus: "A political party seeking to participate in any election organised by the commission (INEC) must conduct primaries, wherein all eligible members of the party must be given equal opportunity to participate in the primaries of the party for the purpose of selecting candidates for elective positions" (INEC, 2022).

"Political parties must not create rules or impose conditions or set high expression of interest or nomination fee that could exclude aspirants on the basis of sex, religion, ethnicity, circumstance of birth or wealth" (INEC, 2022). In like manner, the constitution of the two most popular parties in Nigeria, the All Progressives Congress (APC), and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), states in sum, that regulations and guidelines of the party should consider and uphold the

principles of inclusivity, without prejudice to federal character, gender balance, geopolitical diversity, and rotation of offices to ensure a balanced (INEC, 2014).

While most of these political parties are explicit with the theory of inclusivity for all persons regardless of gender, religion, tribe etc., their activities and actions suggest otherwise. In most cases, aspiring to leadership positions and securing the party ticket goes beyond purchasing nomination forms to the patronage system and godfatherism politics, which may be unfavourable to most women. This political chauvinism accounted largely for the low turnout of women contesting at the presidential level in the 2023 general elections, where there was only one female presidential candidate and no female vice-presidential candidate from the 18 registered political parties. At the governorship level, only 25 out of the 419 governorship candidates were women (Alabi, 2022). For the Federal House of Representatives, there were only 286 women out of 3,107 candidates, while at the State Houses of Assembly only 1,046 out of 10,225 were women (Alabi, 2022) (see Figures 4,5,6).

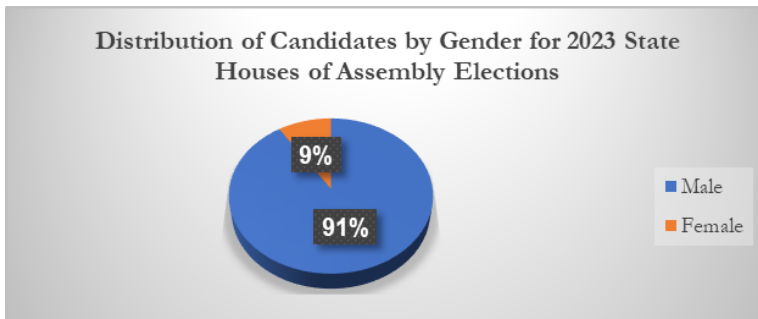


**Figure 4:** Distribution of Candidates by Gender for 2023 State Houses of Assembly Elections. Source: Author's compilation from INEC data (2023)

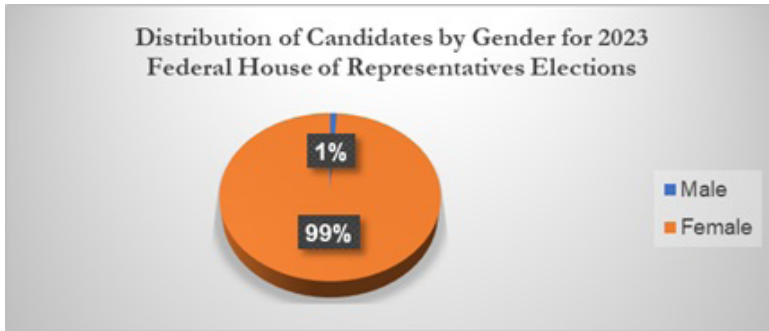


**Figure 5:** Distribution of Candidates by Gender for 2023 Federal House of Representatives Elections. Source: Author's compilation from INEC data (2023)

With respect to the GEB, the high-performing countries as shown in Figure 3, reveal the striking intervention of a quota system effective from the party level. Though the quota system may be legislated or voluntary, it however diffuses political chauvinism manifested through male dominance. For instance, in South Africa and Senegal, the electoral law requires that political parties guarantee that women make up 50% of their candidate lists for subnational elections (Nkereuwem, 2023).

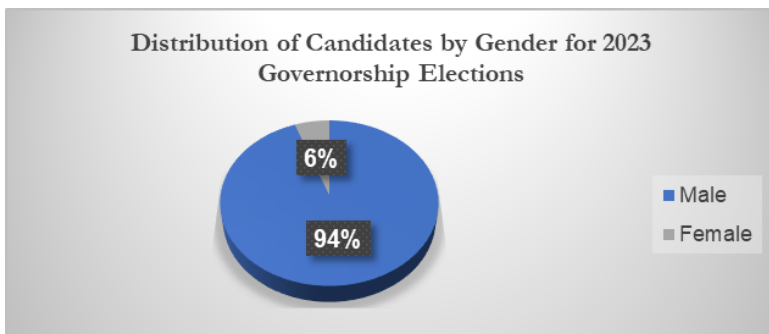


**Figure 6:** Distribution of Candidates by Gender for 2023 Governorship Elections. Author's compilation from INEC data (2023). Source: Author's compilation from INEC data (2023)

In addition, the majority of women who ran for office did so on the platforms of somewhat smaller, and parties established more recently. The larger and older parties like the PDP and the APC were less accommodating to female aspirants, thereby justifying the statistics of over 90% of female candidates vying under the platform of smaller parties. Consequently, as Nkereuwem (2023) opines, four factors; conservative norms and culture, competitive differences between executive and legislative offices, combined effect of novice candidature (high number of political newcomers) and low persistence (staying power) of women candidates who lose elections, including political party gatekeeping, largely accounts for more women candidates dropping out or being eliminated from the race during party primaries.

These political chauvinist traits within political parties in Nigeria solidify male-dominated structures with leadership patterns that favour men. The effect of these is the incessant discrimination that women face within these parties, receiving fewer opportunities to run for office or assume leadership positions that can effect quality representation.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter investigated the GEB from the prism of women's quality representation and political chauvinism in Nigeria. Despite its noble objectives, the GEB has faced significant resistance. Cultural and religious arguments are often cited to oppose the Bill, with some critics claiming that it contravenes traditional values and religious teachings. This resistance highlights the deep-seated patriarchal norms that continue to shape societal attitudes towards gender roles in Nigeria.

Political chauvinism since the independence government in Nigeria, strengthened by culture and religion, has contributed in no small measure to the failure of the GEB in enhancing the quality of women's representation. Limited awareness and understanding of the importance and implications of gender equality legislation creates room for misconceptions about gender equality, leading to resistance or apathy towards the

Bill amongst policymakers, legislators, and the general public. Political chauvinism and the absence of legal equality are amongst many claims voiced by gender advocates to explain women's low representation in politics worldwide. This seems to not be openly recognised by Nigerian decision-makers, as evidenced by the lack of support for the Gender Equality Bill. What seems to attract attention in the debate are frivolous explanations such as political party ideology structured along patriarchy, semantics, and women's performance and strategic behaviour in political competitions. Only minimal attention is devoted to issues of cultural change, women's experience in political institutions, the influence of social movements, and other possible mechanisms of change that can contribute to closing the gender gap.

The chapter highlights cultural and religious beliefs, economic consideration and political party processes as the main channels that political chauvinism has manifested in hampering women's quality representation. Though the Bill has merits in furthering women's representation effectively, these three channels have remained potent in stifling women's vibrancy in politics. Furthermore, considering that political will is critical for the Bill's passage and implementation, without the support of key political and religious actors and stakeholders, the Bill's provisions may remain a theoretical aspiration rather than a practical reality.

Hence, overcoming these barriers requires sustained advocacy, by addressing the underlying social and cultural norms that breed political chauvinism. It is recommended that regular dialogue with religious and traditional leaders on mitigating cultural and religious values over gender equality should be enhanced. In essence, demonstrating that gender equality aligns with the fundamental principles of justice, fairness, and human dignity can foster broader acceptance. This will help to accelerate the passage of the Bill and gradually eliminate political chauvinism. It is also important to raise public awareness about the benefits of gender equality and the provisions of the Bill not only enhance the quality representation of women but also advancing national development. These

advocacy campaigns should target urban and rural areas, making use of traditional and social media to reach diverse audiences.

Notable success stories like Rwanda (above 60%), Senegal (46%), South Africa, Namibia, and Mozambique (above 40%) where females occupy a significant percentage of parliamentary seats (Statista, 2023) with records of tangible levels of development should be highlighted to emphasise the importance of quality women's representation to national development.

## References

- Ajibade, A. T., Mordi, C., Simpson, R. & Iwowo, V. (2021). Social dominance, hypermasculinity, and career barriers in Nigeria. *Gender, Work & Organisation*, 28(1), 175–194. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12537>
- Alabi, M. (2022). 2023: Only 10% of candidates in Nigeria are women. Premium Times, 26 November 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/gender/567616-2023-only-10-of-candidates-in-nigeria-are-women.html?tztc=1>
- Álvarez, L., Rettberg, A. & Serrano, A. J. F. (2023). Gender and politics in social transformations. *Colombia Internacional*, 115(2023), 3–23. <https://doi.org/10.7440/colombiaint115.2023.01>
- Čičkarić, L. (2024). A contribution to the chapter of violence against women in politics. *Etnoantropološki problemi/Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology*, 19(1), 199–216. <https://doi.org/10.21301/eap.v19i1.8>
- Dan-Azumi, J. D. & Asan, C. (2021). Women and legislative representation in Nigeria's National Assembly: A detailed appraisal of the 8th Assembly (2015–2019). *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 11(2), 86109–86109. <https://doi.org/10.5296/jpag.v11i2.18543>
- Dataphyte (2024). On Tinubu's One Year in Office (3). [Online]. Available at: <https://www.dataphyte.com/issue/data-dives/2024/05/on-tinubu-one-year-in-office>

- Ette, M. & Akpan-Obong, P. (2023). Negotiating access and privilege: politics of female participation and representation in Nigeria. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 58(7), 1291–1306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00219096221084253>
- Gambaro, L., Spiess, C. K., Wrohlich, K. & Ziege, E. (2023). Should mama or papa work? Variations in attitudes towards parental employment by country of origin and child age. *Comparative Population Studies*, 48(2023), 339–368. <https://doi.org/10.12765/CPoS-2023-14>
- Goyal, T. (2023). Representation from below: How women’s grassroots party activism promotes equal political participation. *American Political Science Review*, 118(3), 1415–1430. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423000953>
- Gustavsson, G. & Stendahl, L. (2020). National identity, a blessing or a curse? The divergent links from national attachment, pride, and chauvinism to social and political trust’. *European Political Science Review*, 12(4), 449–468. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773920000211>
- Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). (2022). *Regulations and Guidelines for the Conduct of Elections, 2022*. INEC. [Online]. Available at: [https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/REGULATIONS-AND-GUIDELINES-FOR-THE-CONDUCT-OF-ELECTIONS-2022\\_updttd.pdf](https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/REGULATIONS-AND-GUIDELINES-FOR-THE-CONDUCT-OF-ELECTIONS-2022_updttd.pdf)
- INEC (2014). *PDP*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/PDP-Constitution.pdf>
- INEC (n.d). *APC*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/APC-Constitution.pdf>
- Iroanusi Q. E. (2021). *Again, Gender Equality Bill Suffers Setback at Senate*. Premium Times, 15 December 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/500980-again-gender-equality-bill-suffers-setback-at-senate.html>
- Jerumeh, T. R. (2024). Incidence, intensity and drivers of multidimensional poverty among rural women in Nigeria. *Heliyon*, 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e25147>



- Jiang, X., Eaton, S. & Kostka, G. (2023). Women's work: The gendered nature of appointment politics in subnational China. *Government and Opposition*, 60(1), 63–85. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2023.34>
- Kazeem. Y (2016). *Nigerian lawmakers voted down a women equality bill citing the Bible and Sharia Law*. Quartz Africa, updated 21 July 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://qz.com/africa/639763/nigerian-lawmakers-voted-down-a-women-equality-bill-citing-the-bible-and-sharia-law>
- Lemo, H. (2023). *What Does the Recent Election Tell Us About Women's Political Representation in Nigeria?* Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), 22 June 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.cddwestafrica.org/blog/what-does-the-recent-election-tell-us-about-women-s-political-representation-in-nigeria/>
- Nkereuwem, E. (2023). *Why Women Haven't Been Successful in Nigerian Elections*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 9 May 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/05/why-women-havent-been-successful-in-nigerian-elections?lang=en>
- Nosiri, U. D., Oke-Samuel, A. L. & Ibekwe, E. O. (2022). Assessment of women representation in Nigerian politics. *The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies*, 10(3), 162–170. <https://doi.org/10.24940/theijhss/2022/v10/i3/HS2203-030>
- Oyekanmi, O. (2021). Gender Inclusion and Judicial Leadership in Nigeria. *NISER Monograph Series* 29. NISER Ibadan
- Oyekanmi, O. & Pogoson, A.I. (2021). Trends in women's political participation. *Icheke Journal of the Faculty of Humanities*, 19(1), 270–279.
- Payton. M (2016). *Nigerian Senate votes down gender equality bill due to 'religious beliefs*. Independent, 17 March 2016. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/nigerian-senate-votes-down-gender-equality-bill-due-to-religious-beliefs-a6936021.html>

- PLAC (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre). (2024). *Review of relevant information on Nigeria's democracy: Factsheet*. PLAC. [Online]. Available at: <https://placng.org/i/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Percentage-of-Women-in-Parliaments-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa-as-of-February-1-2024.pdf>
- Rudnyckyj, D. & Whittington, J. (2020). The ethnography of the global after globalization. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 10(3), 1042-1045. <https://doi.org/10.1086/712095>
- UKFIET (2023). *What works to advance girls' education in Nigeria? join our UKFIET symposium to learn how we brought 1.5 million girls into school*. UKFIET Education and Development Forum 5 September 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.ukfiet.org/2023/what-works-to-advance-girls-education-in-nigeria-join-our-ukfiet-symposium-to-learn-how-we-brought-1-5-million-girls-into-school/>
- UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). (2018). *Child marriage in West and Central Africa at a glance*. UNICEF. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/chad/media/246/file/Child-Marriage-in-WCA-At-a-Glance.pdf>
- UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). (2022). *UNICEF warns FGM on the rise among young Nigerian girls*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/press-releases/unicef-warns-fgm-rise-among-young-nigerian-girls>
- World Bank (2024). *Nigeria*. World Bank Gender Data Portal. [Online]. Available at: <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/nigeria#>
- World Population Review (2024). *Literacy rate by country 2024*. [Online]. Available at: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/literacy-rate-by-country>



## Chapter Seven

# Achieving SDG5 in the Fourth Industrial Revolution through Women's Participation in Politics and Economic Governance in Africa

**Alison Nyaradzo Zuva** 

*Centre for the Study of Race Gender and Class  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa  
alisonz@uj.ac.za*

**Paul Tichaona Mushonga** 

*Richfield   
Pretoria, South Africa  
PaulM@richfield.ac.za*

### Introduction

The political and economic participation of women is one of the greatest challenges in most African countries (Grosso & Sato, 2017). A wide gap still exists when it comes to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) (UN, 2015), which promotes gender equality (Ojo, 2022). The realisation of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is through gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. According to Statistics Times (2025), despite the fact that women make up half of the world's population, the current demographic data shows men exceed women globally in 2025 by a margin of 50.3% to 49.7%. Even though their numbers are almost equal, the participation of women in formal political structures and processes where decisions regarding

the use of societal resources generated by men and women remains insignificant (Bari, 2005). The absence of women in the decision-making processes means that all the decisions on how society uses resources are made largely by men and is a great disadvantage to women (Bari, 2005). The political participation of women is a key concern for democracy (Grosso & Sato, 2017). For a society to be sustainable and thrive in democracy, all citizens must be involved in public debate and decision-making at all levels.

Since the beginning of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in 2011, gender studies have increased discussions centred around the role of women in politics (Kodila-Tedika et al., 2015). The 4IR gives a chance for women to take full charge of political and economic governance to achieve SDG 5. Although there is no universally accepted definition of political participation, broadly speaking, political participation may be regarded as participating in the political process, such as voting and occupying a political post (Kinge & Adepoju, 2014). In most African countries, women are not politically and economically involved, and this has affected their welfare. The participation of women in political and economic activities is critical to fighting gender inequalities and discrimination against women on the African continent. The presence of women at all levels of decision-making is very crucial. Women should be part of the government and help in developing policies that shape the future of women and the girl child. They should also take part in shaping scientific policies on climate issues, as they equally affect women and their health (Grosso & Sato, 2017).

The research objectives look into assessing Africa's readiness to achieve SDG 5 by 2030. It also determines the challenges that hinder women in Africa from being active in the political and economic spheres. And lastly, it proposes effective ways that can be used to push gender equality and non-discrimination agenda in the 4IR era.

## **Research Gaps and Questions**

African countries have achieved much to fight gender inequality and discrimination against women in the political and economic spheres. However, there have been several structural problems and challenges like poverty, gender-based violence, climate change, and pandemics such as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and malaria that have slowed progress. Slow progress has been noticed in trying to achieve SDG 5 by 2030 (Muswere, 2020). The slow progress in achieving SDG 5 has also affected the achievement of the other SDGs by 2030. This raises the question of whether Africa can achieve the SDGs in the remaining few years. One of the main factors that hinder African women from participating in political, economic, and social spheres is an entrenched patriarchal system dominant on the African continent. The patriarchal system dominates in the socio-cultural African setting. It leads to an imbalance in the social power dynamics where men will always dominate women (Sikweyiya et al., 2020). This hinders the political and economic future of women. The patriarchal system discourages female education and encourages early female marriages, and this destroys the financial inclusion of women in the future (Ojo, 2022). In most African countries, the urge to implement gender-responsive strategies and policies is not there. The Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015) and Agenda 2063 (AU, 2013) are based on inclusive growth and sustainable development but will remain a mere aspiration if the levels of gender inequality remain unchecked.

## **Literature Review**

### **Liberal Feminist Theory**

This chapter has adopted a liberal feminist theory. “Liberal Feminism rests on the conception that human nature is individualistic and ensuring equal space for both sexes is the main concern of this framework” (Kumar & Gautam, 2019). Liberal theory is a “feminist theory that believes gender inequality is created by lowering access for women and girls to

civil rights and allocation of social resources such as education, and employment” (Giddens, 2006; Enyew & Mihrete, 2018). The historical development of liberal feminism can be traced back to the Enlightenment period. Liberal feminism is rooted in political thought and philosophy that drives the agenda of women’s emancipation through the notion of equal treatment of men and women. The key tenants of the Liberal feminist theory include equal citizenship, democracy, universal rights, and autonomy (Tong & Botts, 2009). Liberal feminists dismiss and cast aspersions on the inferior treatment of women because of their biological differences to men. They advance the assertion that the key differences based on biology must never be used as a weapon to subjugate women as it is merely a difference in genetic and reproductive makeup. There is no justifiable reason that can be advanced for preventing women from having the same rights as men. Women must enjoy in equal measure the same rights and privileges enjoyed by men in areas such as employment opportunities and education amongst others (Enyew & Mihrete, 2018). “Liberal Feminism is characterised by an individualistic emphasis on equality” (Khattak, 2011). One of the key strengths of liberal feminism is that it does not deny the inherent physical and biological differences between men and women. Its assertion, however, is that women must not be treated as inferior to men. There must be equality in the treatment of men and women (Nienaber & Moraka, 2016).

### **Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5)**

Women’s equality and empowerment is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015). SDG 5 focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (UN, 2015). Women and girls everywhere, must have equal rights and opportunities to live a life free of violence and discrimination. A huge gender gap still exists in Africa and SDG 5 moves towards trying to bridge that gap. While more women have occupied political positions in recent years, including through the use of special quotas, they still hold a mere 23.7% of parliamentary seats, far short of parity (Martinez & Mellado, 2020). In the private sector, the situation is not

much better. Globally women occupy less than a third of senior and middle management positions. In achieving SDG 5, Agenda 2030 promises to remove all barriers that hinder women and children to achieve their full potential. The achievement of all the SDGs depends on the achievement of Goal 5. It is crucial to achieve gender equality in Africa, as it helps in the fight against poverty (Kodila-Tedika et al., 2015). Not only does it help to fight poverty, but it is also fundamental to the development of Africa (Jallah et al., 2021). A gap in gender equality leaves females at a disadvantage and this can be related to the level of illiteracy amongst women in Africa (Ojo, 2022).

### **The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)**

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) brought many technological changes that have shifted the workplace and society. It represents a new and powerful industrial wave with an orientation towards digital and virtual technologies and customer service. The 4IR is supported by disruptive technologies which have a profound rapid and radical global economic, political, and social transformation driven, amongst others, by the Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), genetic engineering, quantum computing, automation, and 3D printing (Chiweshe, 2019). The 4IR introduced many digital technologies such as robotics, AI, machine learning, and IoT (Schwab, 2017). The 4IR is a revolution that has fundamentally changed the way that people live, work, and relate to one another (Schwab, 2017). Africa has entered into a new unprecedented economic trajectory driven by the 4IR, whose impact and effect are uncertain for everyone but is anticipated to have a significant impact and consequences for women and children (Ndung'u & Signé, 2020). Africa has not yet fully adopted the 21<sup>st</sup> century digital transition. Studies show that it still lags in several indicators essential for a successful digital revolution (Ndung'u & Signé, 2020). Most African countries have enormously adopted digital technologies to boost the political and economic participation of women. The digital financial inclusion of women results in their economic

empowerment and contributes to financial decision-making (Ojo, 2022).

### **African Women in the 4IR**

Technological advances in the 4IR create specific opportunities and improvements in the quality of life of women across Africa (Chiweshe, 2019). It also provides women with opportunities to take part in the political and economic spheres thereby reducing the gender gap that exists. Women can be a powerful instrument of political and economic change in the 4IR. African women have a golden opportunity to relaunch the women's agenda of gender equality in a way that will fast-track social, political, and economic change by making use of the transition into the 4IR. The political and economic transition can secure the kind of social change that would give women a more meaningful life.

The 4IR advances will give women more opportunities such as access to finances through digital financial inclusion, and flexible working conditions that allow them to work from home and contribute positively to economic growth. At the same time, 4IR technologies help to improve the quality of life of women (Chiweshe, 2019). Promoting girls at a younger age to take up science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) will help to create better societies and at the same time prepare women to enter the workforce and increase the overall economic growth. Thus, there is a need to foster a culture of STEM, gender, and sex education at all levels and at the same time encourage an entrepreneurial skills mindset amongst women and young girls (Damilola, 2020).

Women's employment is being placed at risk in the productive sectors. This has been attributed to automation (Damilola, 2020). More women are facing job losses. Most women are employed in low-skill sectors; hence, they are at a higher risk of losing their jobs. This was proved during the COVID-19 pandemic when a higher percentage of women lost their jobs as they did not fall under the critical jobs segment. This provides a chance for women to take an active part in the political and economic structures of society. This ensures



that women are part of decision-makers and make decisions that best favour them and their families. By doing so, issues of gender inequalities will be solved, thereby achieving the 2030 Agenda.

### **Women's Participation in Politics in Africa**

Women are nearly half of the global population, however, their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is more than half as compared to that of men because of their dual roles in the productive sphere (StatisticsTimes/UN, 2024). Yet their participation in formal political structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by men and women are made, remains insignificant. Presently, women's representation in legislatures around the world is 15%. SDG 5 on gender equality provides for women's increased and meaningful participation in political decision-making. This global agenda to be achieved by 2030 will remain a dream if Africa does not change its systems, practices, and policies to ensure that more women sit at the political table. In normative theories of democracy, the premise is that women are equal citizens and should, therefore, participate in politics on equal terms with men (Kayuni & Chikadza, 2016). However, in almost every country and locality, there are fewer women in elected positions who are active in the political and economic spheres of governance in Africa.

The historical exclusion of women from the political structures and processes is caused by multiple structural, functional, and personal factors that vary in different social contexts across different countries (Bari, 2005). The nature of politics in a country and liberal democracy determines the participation of women in politics. In some countries, the political sphere is too harsh such that women prefer to stay away and fend for their families. Democracy has for the longest time served men better than women. More women in politics tend to motivate other women thereby increasing the number of women who run for an elective office. In recent times, the perception of women holding public office has improved. The increase in women participating in politics is crucial as they

can use their influence to recruit more women into politics (Sawer, 2000).

## **Women's Participation in Economic Change in Africa**

The participation of women in economic activities is important for their personal development and status in society (Singh, 1987). Women must participate in the labour force of their countries, participate in economic issues on an equal footing with men, and be fully integrated into the system (Staudt, 1986). Engels was one of the first theorists to stress women's integration in the economy. He emphasised that getting resources into women's hands, integrating women in the wage labour force, and securing female rights to enable and empower women for other actions were deemed worthy in themselves (Staudt, 1986). Legal reforms that promote women's economic inclusion are slowly being implemented globally (Loayza & Trumbic, 2020). This also implies the slow progress of societies and the entire world. The unequal economic inclusion of women exposes them during challenging times such as pandemics, shocks, and crises that the world is facing. The COVID-19 pandemic left many women and girls impacted by the economic crisis (Loayza & Trumbic, 2020).

Recently, studies have shown that gender equality is "smart economics" (Revenge & Shetty, 2012). Women have full potential which remains untouched. This is detrimental to society and the world as this leads to lost opportunities for economic growth (Revenge & Shetty, 2012). The economic inclusion of women promotes agricultural productivity, and enterprise development at the micro, small, and medium enterprise levels, as well as enhances business management and returns on investment. A multiplier effect is created when women fully participate in economic activities, as they will reinvest their income into the communities and their families. Women are key to creating peaceful and stable societies and enhancing economic growth. In Africa, these benefits have not been fully recognised and accepted, hence not fully translated

into women's full economic participation. Women have faced many challenges that hinder them from full economic participation. These challenges include a lack of access to property rights, proper networks, mentors, training, finance, technology, and markets (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2020).

The projection of an in-depth synopsis of women's political participation and economic governance in Africa is cemented through case analysis of Morocco, Liberia, Malawi and Cameroon. Their geographic segmentation as a representation of different African regions provides a critical lens to understand the various country and regional differentials that depict, influence and shape the participation or marginalisation of women in Africa in politics and economic governance. To understand the different political and economic landscapes in which women in Africa experience, the chapter begins by discussing the political and economic dynamics in Morocco.

### **Women in Morocco's political participation**

There has been a marked increase in women's representation and political participation in Morocco. The growth can be traced back to 2002 through the launch of the first gender quota (Grosso & Sato, 2017). The institutional changes, women's mobilisation, and policy reforms have led to a more politically inclusive environment. In all the efforts to promote the political inclusion of women, challenges remain (Martinez & Mellado, 2020). The Moroccan general elections of 2021 resulted in a significant increase in the participation and representation of women in politics. Women, however, still lag and remain under-represented across various levels of decision-making (Tadlaoui, 2021).

The political participation of women in Morocco is hindered by many challenges. The challenges include patriarchal societal stereotypes, the marriage of underage girls, constraints in accessing education, and limited access to economic resources (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2020). All these challenges restrict women's participation and hamper gender equality. Men head the majority of political parties, and this makes it difficult

for women to establish themselves. The political landscape is dominated by men who have a significant influence on electoral laws, and this creates a limiting environment for women's political participation (Grosso & Sato, 2017).

### **Legislative Reforms to Enhance Political and Economic Participation**

Promoting gender equality in Morocco has been strengthened through legislative reforms (Mouline et al., 2022). The reforms undertaken in 2021 focused on increasing women's economic participation by ensuring improved representation at the board level within public companies. Establishing a mandatory quota for women is meant to ensure that by 2024 Morocco has at least 30% female representation at the board level of public enterprises. This threshold is set to increase to 40% by 2027 (Grosso & Sato, 2017). Despite the enactment of legislative reforms, women in Morocco continue to experience discrimination, stigma, and inequalities perpetuated by men. The political, economic, social, and cultural domains are dominated by men and hamper women's participation (Mouline et al., 2022). The systematic exclusion of women reinforces patriarchy and drives women to poverty (Grosso & Sato, 2017). Women's increased participation in politics in Morocco has helped to strengthen the women's emancipation movement. Moroccan women have succeeded in building broad coalitions and networks and forging links with other political and rights-based actors (Castillejo & Tilley, 2015). Secondly, close links have been established with ordinary women, who have familiarised themselves with their concerns. Thirdly, the women's movement has shown great flexibility and agility in responding to changing circumstances and opportunities.

### **Bridging Fundamental Differences for a Bigger Cause**

Women in Morocco are not a homogeneous group. There are many fundamental differences, such as age, religion, marital status, race, culture, and political affiliation, which have

to be bridged for the more significant cause of enhancing participation. The strides made by the Moroccan women's movement include breaking the divide between religious and secular women. This was a significant step in strengthening women's voice within the broader feminist agenda and the strengthening of women's cause within the international community. The ability of Moroccan women to set aside their differences and foster unity for their emancipation is critical in their fight for equality and autonomy.

### **Government Political Support for Reforms to Advance Women's Political and Economic Participation**

The political support and political will demonstrated by King Mohammed VI were instrumental in increasing women's political participation. The adoption of women's quotas was supported and encouraged by the king in the national and local elections of 2002 and 2009 respectively. This assisted in increasing women's participation and representation in politics (Castillejo & Tilley, 2015).

### **Positive Milestones, but Still a Long Way to Go**

The positive milestones that have been achieved in the political and economic domain of women's participation include increased access of girls to education, increased levels of employment for women, improvement in women's health, and a family structure hinged on the nuclear family (Castillejo & Tilley, 2015). The achievement of policy reforms has however been limited in its impact by poor implementation. The resistance to implementing further reforms has the potential effect of reversing the gains that have already been achieved (Castillejo & Tilley, 2015).

Whilst Morocco has made significant gains in ensuring the increased participation of women in politics and economics, it is important to illustrate that Africa is not a homogenous continent. Whilst Morocco is situated in North Africa, Malawi, on the other hand, is situated in Southern Africa. The country

and regional differences may result in different experiences for women. The political and economic participation of women in Malawi can provide new imperatives for the Southern part of Africa.

### **Political participation of women in Malawi**

Malawi is one of the poorest societies not only in the world but also within sub-Saharan Africa (Hyder & Behrman, 2014). Much has to be undertaken to achieve SDG 5 using the 4IR technologies in Malawi. Many women are involved in informal work such as agriculture-related activities, buying, and selling, and the cotton industry. The formal politics in Malawi is dominated by a patriarchal structure (Kayuni & Chikadza, 2016). Critical decisions that impact women's lives are therefore made by men.

Feminist theorists have noted that men cannot fully represent women's issues, as there are areas in women's lives that can only be best articulated by women (Kamlongera, 2008). The involvement of women in state politics is very critical as it enables the attainment of gender balance, which is vital for a healthy democracy and equal access to power and resources for all. Malawi attained its independence in 1964. Since attaining independence, women in Malawi have been significantly excluded from participating in politics. The democratic framework of Malawi has not afforded women equal representation in various spheres of government (Kamlongera, 2008). Women in Malawi have been socialised into the idea of voting for mainly male political candidates (Ott & Kanyongolo, 2009). The political participation of women in Malawi in key areas of wielding political power is very limited. The majority of Malawian women are always present at political rallies, thus showing their interest in politics. Despite being the majority and showing political interest, their participation still lags compared to that of men (Kamlongera, 2008). The traditional gender roles ascribed to women in Malawian society reflect their low political participation.

Women are regarded as followers and not leaders. Furthermore, women in politics are not seen as politicians, but as someone who has moved away from the societal norm of womanhood (Barnes & Burchard, 2013). Patriarchy negatively affects the progress of gender equality in Malawi. This has resulted in few women contesting to become president of the nation. There has also been a societal view that Malawi as a nation must not be ruled by a woman president and the nation itself is not ready for women leaders (Gabay, 2014).

## Legislative Reforms

The Malawi government has taken strides to fight gender discrimination through different legislative reforms. The 1994 Constitution of Malawi prohibits discrimination in any form. Section 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi provides for equal and effective protection of all persons against discrimination on different grounds, including gender. Section 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi also establishes the principle that the state should promote the welfare and development of all people of Malawi by progressively adopting and implementing policies and legislation aimed at achieving gender equality and the full participation of women in all spheres of Malawian society (Constituteproject.org, 1994).

The low participation of women in Malawian in politics has been attributed to a wide range of factors that include social, economic, and legal factors that range from the social, economic, and legal (Ott & Kanyongolo, 2009). The failure to institute legal reforms also contributes to the low numbers of women participating in politics. It has been noted that the current electoral laws in Malawi have not contributed much to empowering women in the political landscape. The principles of equality and non-discrimination have not been consistently applied to the electoral laws of Malawi. To achieve meaningful participation of women in politics, there is a need to legally empower women by putting in place laws that promote gender equality and, in some instances, affirmative action. Legal empowerment refers to the *“use of the law as a tool to empower the poor and marginalised”* (UN, 2009). It is a process

of systematic change through which the poor and excluded are enabled to use the law, the legal system, and legal services to protect and advance their rights and interests (Naresh, 2008). The enhancement of electoral laws in areas such as candidate nomination, vote counting, polling station management, determination, and announcement of results has the positive effect of improving women's political participation if properly implemented (UN, 2009). It is therefore essential to evaluate the law as it creates the foundation for citizens' participation (including women's participation) in politics (Hyder & Behrman, 2014).

### **Affirmative Action in Malawi**

Affirmative action is crucial for the meaningful political participation of women. It provides space for increasing the representation of women in politics. In countries such as South Africa and Uganda, a variety of affirmative action measures, such as reserving seats for women in parliament, have been put in place (Goetz, 1998). In these two countries, the participation and representation of women in politics have increased (Goetz, 1998). Section 20 (2) and Section 24 (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Malawi, 1994, states that legislation may be passed that addresses inequalities in society, including gender inequalities.

### **Malawi's Women's Economic Participation**

The main agenda in Malawi is the promotion of gender equality. Throughout all the economic structures, gender gaps persist, and this is slowing down the progress of SDG 5. Malawi is lagging across several indicators related to women's economic opportunities. The country, however, has one of the highest labour force participation rates. The largest employment sector in Malawi is the agricultural sector (Spring, 2019). 59% of women are employed in that sector, but there are still large gender productivity gaps (World Bank, 2021a). The gender productivity gaps are caused by women having challenges in terms of accessing resources which include labour, technology,



and inputs such as seeds and fertilisers (Rodgers & Akram-Lodhi, 2019; Fisher & Kandiwa, 2014). Men in the agricultural sector attain higher yields than women.

Morocco and Malawi provide similar and different experiences in relation to women's political participation and economic governance. The critical insight provided by the data depicts that despite key differentials, Africa has made significant strides in widening the political and economic spectrum for women's participation. Liberia provides an important lens because of the economic and political challenges that it has faced, driven by protracted civil wars which resulted in political unrest and instability.

### **Political Participation of Women in Liberia**

Liberian women are regarded as the weaker gender (Jallah et al., 2021). Most women born between the 1900s and 2001 have a mindset that women are of lesser need in collective societal activities. This idea has fledged fully into a stereotypical concept in the minds of females, thus leaving a huge gap in the confidence for an equal sense of participation in the political processes of their constituencies. The Liberian legislature is made up of less than 10% of women (UNDP, 2021). This shows the under-representation of women in government structures and processes. This has been a growing concern for electoral stakeholders and international partners in the country. Equal political participation by women is key to sustaining peace and national development. Victimisation and violence against women are still persistent in Liberia. This poses a challenge for women to participate fully in politics (Liu, 2022).

The exclusion of women in politics and governance is a result of a lack of adequate finances, cultural backgrounds, the type of political class systems, access to education, job opportunities, and the level of socio-economic development (UNDP, 2021). This exclusion of women makes it difficult to establish the core values of a democratic society. Women are excluded from occupying key positions in important decision-making bodies. This obstructs economic development and

discourages the attainment of gender equality in societies (Mvukiyehe, 2018). A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed in 2017 between the National Elections Commission (NEC) and nineteen political parties. The MOU supports a 30% gender quota and contains five pillars with specific actions to be implemented by political parties towards achieving the 30% benchmark set by the National Elections Commission (Gharib, 2022).

### **Women in Liberia's Economic Participation**

Liberia is amongst the poorest African states despite its abundant wealth and favourable geographic location (World Bank, 2021b). Low literacy rates in local constituencies and having more remote places than urban areas for men and women can be linked to the current state of the country's economy. Women are under-represented compared to men (Jallah et al., 2021). In Liberia, 74% of all the female workers are informal labourers. These women face a myriad of challenges ranging from difficulties in accessing credit and banking facilities, lack of proper social protection mechanisms, limited financial literacy, and business training.

The Ebola pandemic resulted in a health and economic crisis for Liberia (World Bank, 2021b). The economic and health situation in Liberia was further worsened by the outbreak of COVID-19. On 16 March 2020, Liberia announced its first COVID-19 case (Nyiauwung et al., 2022). This resulted in the introduction of specific measures to mitigate the spread of the virus. These measures included social distancing and the closure of schools, churches and businesses (International Monetary Fund, 2021). The gender disparities that exist in Liberia resulted in women suffering major economic losses that were caused by job losses. The majority of women were employed in the hardest-hit sectors such as trading, small-scale fisheries sector, and services (Geist et al., 2020). Women traders and those in fisheries experienced severe economic effects caused by the COVID-19 restrictions on the movement of customers (Campbell et al., 2021). Their fish trading suffered because of a lack of customers, resulting in rotten stock (Nyiauwung et al.,

2022). The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic severely hampered the operations of women's businesses, which curtailed their livelihoods and decreased their income (DFID, 2001).

Liberia provides a context in which the country has abundant resources but the marginalisation of women in political and economic participation persists. There is an opportunity for Liberia to learn and adopt some mechanisms from Morocco and Malawi that have led to increased women's participation. Cameroon is situated in central Africa and provides further insight into the challenges and opportunities being experienced by African women in the quest for political and economic emancipation.

### **Women in Cameroon's Political and Economic Participation**

Women constitute 52% of the population in Cameroon (Fonjong, 2001). They have a significant role to fulfil in the development of society. The major problem that women face in Cameroon is that they function as subordinates, not managers or leaders. This is the state of affairs in traditional and state institutions. The empowerment of women in Cameroon is a national issue of concern. State and international efforts at mainstreaming women in development have produced mixed results. There is a low representation of women in politics, and discrimination against women is still persistent in custom. Politics continues to be considered a man's domain. Women face various barriers limiting their participation as voters and candidates, even though they represent 52% of the population. Many women do not have a voter's card, and if they do, sometimes they are instructed by their husbands on how to vote and can face reprisals and violence from their spouses for voting according to their conscience. In social and economic matters, wages remain unequal between men and women, especially in the private sector. The recruitment process is discriminatory against women. The majority of women work in agriculture and informal sectors. Employment opportunities for women are limited, and this affects their economic and negotiation

power. This hinders the exercising of other rights, including participation in political life (Kinge, 2016).

## Comparative Insights of Political and Economic Participation of Women in Africa:

**Table 1:** Female Political Leaders as of 2024

| Country  | Total Number of Male and Women Political Leaders | No of Women Political Leaders | % of Women Political Leaders |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Morocco  | 19                                               | 5                             | 26.3                         |
| Cameroon | 34                                               | 5                             | 14.7                         |
| Malawi   | 21                                               | 8                             | 38.1                         |
| Liberia  | 17                                               | 5                             | 29.4                         |

*Source: United Nations Women: Women Political Leaders (2024)*

The table shows the total number of political leaders in the four countries and the number and percentage of women in those political leadership positions. As illustrated in the table, the number of women in positions of political power as of 2024 remains low across all countries discussed in this chapter despite commitments to increase the number of women in political positions. According to the 2024 Afro barometer (International IDEA, 2024) women's political participation in Africa increased by 1% from 2021 to 2024. The Afro barometer further notes that it will take African countries up to 2100 to reach equal political participation for women. At the national and local levels, most African countries, such as Morocco, have come up with a quota system to promote more women to take up political leadership positions.

These quotas, however, have not been effective as there is a lack of political will to implement them. Furthermore, patriarchy is still the dominant barrier to the political participation of women in Africa and the countries discussed in this chapter. Women fail to break through into political spaces because society expects them to be confined to be the wife

and perform motherly duties. This therefore poses challenges for the majority of women when they are trying to juggle between household responsibilities and work, which becomes an obstacle for them to break through to political leadership positions. The majority of African beliefs and attitudes on the political participation of women in politics often discourages women. Women are not allowed to take up leadership positions, as the positions are regarded as male positions. When women want to take part in politics they are often abused and fail to break through the male dominated landscape. Women also lack resources to support their political desires. They do not have the financial resources that allow them to campaign and they do not have support from government institutions, which hampers their progress. The media is also not fair to female political candidates. Social media specifically causes more problems than solutions for female political leaders. Female political leaders often encounter online gender-based violence which is now a new problem that is being experienced by women in politics and no help seems to be available for them.

The table shows that the total number of political leaders in Morocco is 19; female political leaders is 5 and the percentage of women in political leadership is 26.3%. These figures show that in Morocco, women occupy over a quarter of the political leadership positions. Strides have been made in Morocco to have more women's inclusion in politics though they are still the minority compared to men. Morocco is a North African country that has a blend of Islamic traditions and the reforms are progressive. The country has cultural and institutional challenges that hinder women's political participation. In Cameroon, female political leaders comprise 14.7% of the population. This shows that gender equality in politics in the country is not prioritised compared to other African countries. The major barriers to women's political participation in Cameroon are cultural barriers exacerbated by political instability. The figures in Table 1 show that Malawi has 38.1% of women's political participation. This high percentage (as compared to the other countries in this chapter) of women's political participation can be attributed to the fact that in the

history of politics in Malawi, a female president was appointed from 2012 to 2014.

The appointment of Joyce Banda was necessitated by the country's political stability making Malawi a pioneer in promoting the participation of women in the political sphere. Liberia has the highest percentage of female political leaders. After the conflicts that occurred in Liberia in the period of 2002 to 2009, as part of the peace-building efforts, more women were given leadership opportunities. The post-conflict rebuilding efforts supported the inclusion of women in politics and their appointment to political decision-making positions. Furthermore, the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the first elected female head of state gave room for more women to be included in politics and be accepted as political leaders.

Figure 1 shows the figures of women in managerial positions in the countries discussed in this chapter. These managerial positions depict the number of women who participate economically in these countries. The figures in Figure 1 show that when it comes to the economic participation of women, Liberia has the highest number of women in managerial positions. The high percentage of women in managerial positions in Liberia can be attributed to various factors such as the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President. This gave women increased opportunities for their participation in the economy. Liberia also has gender equality policies that focus on empowering women in economic spaces through their participation in business and leadership. In Cameroon, the percentage of women in managerial positions is 51.66%. This high percentage is attributed to the fact that the country has instituted reforms that promote gender equality. This has seen the rise of more women in managerial positions. Malawi has 17.57% of women in managerial positions. This low percentage is attributed to the fact that the country remains a patriarchal society. Women in Malawi are limited by traditional gender roles that prohibit them from taking up decision-making positions. The majority of women in Malawi are not educated, and therefore, they cannot take up managerial positions.

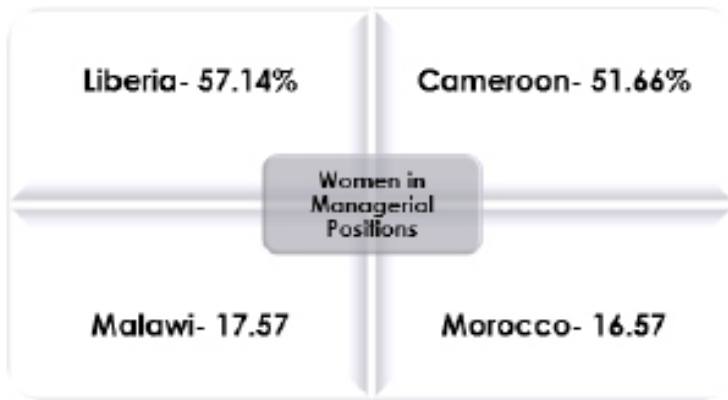


**Figure 1:** Women in Managerial Positions 2024. Source: Author's conceptualisation

## Methodology

This chapter uses a systematic literature review. The reviewed literature was from reports, scholarly journals, and conference proceedings on women's political and economic participation in Africa. These were derived from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, EBSCOhost, and Elsevier.

## Findings and Discussions

The continent of Africa is saddled with a small number of women holding key positions in political party structures. Only 12% of women hold top-party leadership positions. Women are still largely excluded from political and economic participation (IDEA, 2021). There is still much work that needs to be done to bridge existing gender inequalities to achieve SDG 5 by 2030.

## Access to Resources

The political participation of women in all the countries under chapter is hindered by a lack of finances. There is a great disparity in access to resources between male and female politicians. Male politicians have better access to resources

which bolsters their campaigns and makes it easier to participate in the political space as compared to women. The political participation of women and the hampering of their aspirations in Africa is dampened by limited access to resources. The difficulties that women experience in accessing resources discourage them from taking active participation in politics (IDEA: 2021). Women need to take advantage of the 4IR digital technologies such as social media platforms, to engage with the masses, campaign and discuss women's issues. Digital financial inclusion is also a way for women to participate in the economic change in their countries. The 4IR technologies can be used by women to make decisions about economic activities in society.

The digital challenges faced by women in Cameroon are illustrated in the National Gender Policy Document of 2011–2020 and the Digital Vision of 2020. Barriers faced by women encompass limited financial access, digital illiteracy, language, and family commitments (IMF, 2020). The increased participation of women in the political and economic space is enhanced by their digital empowerment. The major impediment that has slowed the digital empowerment of women is the lack of political will to avail sufficient resources for this venture. In Cameroon, the problem of misappropriation of funds meant to digitally empower women through digital literacy programmes and championing women's and girls' STEM programmes has been of considerable concern (Nsaidzedze: 2020). There is considerable evidence that women's participation in politics increases through their digital empowerment. South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana have witnessed increased women's participation in politics through digital empowerment (Nsaidzedze, 2020).

### **Adoption of Quotas and Political Will**

The participation of African women in politics and economic governance is enhanced through the adoption of quotas and political will. The legislation of quotas is important, as it creates a binding system that is important for implementation (IDEA, 2021). The promotion of legislation without a political will is problematic and will not guarantee success. Countries that have



voluntarily embraced a quota system for women's political and economic participation have been seen to be more successful in embracing and implementing quotas when compared to those that have been forced to do so because of a legislated position. This phenomenon illustrates the importance of political will as a key imperative to realise enhanced women's participation (IDEA, 2021).

### **Women's Participation Crucial for Women's Empowerment and Development**

The increased participation of women in politics and economic spheres is important, as it improves their well-being. As women participate and occupy key positions, they can influence decisions. There is evidence that when women occupy key positions in politics and economics, they can work for the development of all, thus overcoming the blurred lines of political affiliation. The societal problems that have been faced by women over a prolonged period, such as gender-based violence, electoral reform constraints, gender equality, and childcare can be rigorously confronted through enhanced women's participation (Sahu & Yadav, 2018).

### **Recommendations**

#### **Enhanced Political will from male elite political leaders**

Men dominate the African political domain structure. The men in political leadership positions become political elites. Their stance towards the support and promotion of women's leadership ascent is vital. The development of winning their support may not be easy as they seek to maintain the status quo. There is a general belief amongst the male political elite that it is very difficult for women to win elections. There is, therefore, a need to develop innovative ways to win their political support for championing gender equality (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016).

### **Promotion and redesign of quota systems**

The adoption of the quota system by some African countries has led to an improvement in women's political and economic participation in the 4IR dispensation. The importance of quotas is that they create a system that gives impetus to political leaders to fill the relevant quotas with women candidates. The proper design and implementation of the quota system are important. The effect of poorly designed quotas provides an avenue for the circumvention and undermining of the participation of women (Krook & Zetterberg, 2014; O'Neil & Domingo, 2016).

### **Investment in digital resources for women**

There is a need for increased access to digital technologies for women and the girl children. The employment and safeguarding of jobs for women in the 4IR environment are enhanced through digital literacy and empowerment. Women's activism and advocacy, which help to cement their collective power and fight gender-based violence, marginalisation, oppression, and stereotypes are enhanced and strengthened through digital mobilisation. The impediment to the large-scale promotion of the digital empowerment of women is constrained by structural, political, social, and economic hurdles that are discriminatory and stifle the mass release of resources for women's digitalisation programmes. The failure to address the gender digital imbalance has the propensity to increase gender inequality (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016).

### **Collaboration, unity, and exemplary leadership.**

SDG 5 can be achieved through a collaborative and unified effort from women. Women need to overcome differences that range from religion, educational level, culture, age, and marital status amongst others, and unite to confront challenges hindering participation. This can be achieved by women developing systems and approaches that enhance collaboration (O'Neil & Domingo, 2016).

More research should focus on women's political and economic participation in rural areas. This is a group that does

not have enough representation and advocacy. We would like to further our research on the political and economic participation of disabled women in Africa. Nothing much has been said about the digital financial inclusion of disabled women and women living with albinism. An exploration of the digital literacy of women in Africa and its impact on women's empowerment is an area for further research.

## **Conclusion**

The attainment of SDG 5 on gender equality within the domain of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) presents opportunities and challenges for Africa. There is a need for the continent to take advantage of the 4IR by cementing opportunities and addressing challenges to ensure maximum benefit. The success of the 4IR in Africa is enhanced by the active participation of women in the political and economic spheres. The changing dynamics in the political and economic trajectory of Africa, driven by transformation, innovation and empowered decision-making places women at the centre of effective governance. The involvement of women is critical in promoting gender equality and enhancing political and economic inclusivity. It is also crucial to note that the reshaping of industries and the labour market by the 4IR requires women to participate in order to drive equitable growth and social progress. Governments, civil society and the private sector have a role to play in creating an enabling environment for women to have access to education, resources and leadership opportunities.

The development and promotion of policies that are gender-responsive will ensure that women across Africa contribute meaningfully to economic governance and benefit from the opportunities that are presented by technological advancements. Finally, the achievement of SDG 5 in the context of the 4IR demands the collective action of all. It stands as a collective responsibility of governments, civil society organisations and the private sector to push towards the achievement of SDG 5 in the 4IR era and the implementation systemic change. The 4IR has provided a new trajectory and impetus to redefine the critical political and economic role

of African women as key role players. The dismantling of patriarchy and cultural hinderances that hamper women's participation in politics and economics need to be dismantled. The potential for Africa's political strengthening and economic development is immense with the full participation and embracement of women. The active participation of women in politics and economic governance is important as Africa seeks to successfully navigate the complexities of the 4IR. The amplification of the voice of the African woman is paramount in a changing continental political and economic discourse.

### References

- African Union (AU). (2013). *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. AU. [Online]. Available at: <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>
- Asongu, S. & Odhiambo, N. (2020). Inequality and the economic participation of women in sub-Saharan Africa: An empirical investigation. *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies*, 11(2), 193–206. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AJEMS-01-2019-0016>
- Barnes, T. D. & Burchard, S. M. (2013). “Engendering” politics: The impact of descriptive representation on women's political engagement in sub-Saharan Africa. *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(7), 767–790. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012463884>
- Bari, F. (2005). Women's political participation: Issues and challenges. In: *United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women Expert Group Meeting: Enhancing Participation of Women in Development through an Enabling Environment for Achieving Gender Equality and the Advancement of Women*. Bangkok (Vol. 393). UN. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/enabling-environment2005/index.html>
- Campbell, S. J., Jakub, R., Valdivia, A., Setiawan, H., Setiawan, A., Cox, C., ... & Box, S. (2021). Immediate impact of COVID-19 across tropical small-scale fishing communities. *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 200, 105485. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2020.105485>

## Chapter Seven

- Castillejo, C. & Tilley, H. (2015). The road to reform: women's political voice in Morocco. *Overseas Development Institute*. [Online]. Available at: [Developmentprogress.org](http://Developmentprogress.org).
- Chiweshe, M. K. (2019). *Fourth Industrial Revolution: What's in it for African Women?* Africa Portal. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/fourth-industrial-revolution-whats-it-african-women/>
- Constituteproject.org. (1994). *Malawi's Constitution of 1994 with Amendments*. Constitute Project. [Online. Available at: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/mlw136089.pdf>
- Damilola, P. O. (2020). *The Role of Women in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Nigeria's Readiness for and the Effect of the Fourth Industrial Revolution*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.exploring-economics.org/en/discover/role-of-women-fourth-industrial-revolution/>.
- Department for International Development (DfID). (2001). *Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets, Section 2-Introduction*. London: DFID. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.ennonline.net/attachments/872/section2.pdf>.
- Enyew, B. E. & Mihrete, A. G. (2018). Liberal feminism: Assessing its compatibility and applicability in Ethiopia context. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 10(6), 59–64. <https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA2018.0769>
- Fisher, M. & Kandiwa, V. (2014). Can agricultural input subsidies reduce the gender gap in modern maize adoption? Evidence from Malawi. *Food Policy*, 45, 101–111. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2014.01.007>
- Fonjong, L. (2001). Fostering women's participation in development through non-governmental efforts in Cameroon. *Geographical Journal*, 167(3), 223–234. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-4959.00020>
- Gabay, C. (2014). Two 'transitions': The political economy of Joyce Banda's rise to power and the related role of civil society organisations in Malawi. *Review of African Political Economy*, 41(141), 374–388. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2014.901949>

- Geist, A., Decker, A. & Delavell, F. (2020). *Supporting African women through the economic consequences of COVID-19*. World Bank Blogs. [Online]. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/africacan/supporting-african-women-through-economic-consequences-covid-19>
- Gharib, M. W. (2022). *Strengthening Laws To Institutionalize Women Political Participation*. African News Agency, 14 June 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.africannewsagency.com/the-new-dawn/strengthening-laws-to-institutionalize-women-political-participation-765748ad-6965-5ddb-a9aa-3aa5a9501487/>. [Accessed 20 June 2022].
- Giddens, A. (2006). *Sociology*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Goetz, A. M. (1998). Women in politics & gender equity in policy: South Africa & Uganda. *Review of African Political Economy*, 25(76), 241–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056249808704312>
- Grosso, S. & Sato, K. (2017). *Counting (on) Women in Politics: Experiences from Morocco & Tunisia*. UNESCO.
- Gu, D., Andreev, K. & Dupre, M. E. (2021). Major trends in population growth around the world. *China CDC Weekly*, 3(28), 604. <https://doi.org/10.46234/ccdcw2021.160>
- Hyder, A. & Behrman, J. R. (2014). Female economic activity in rural Malawi. *Journal for Development and Leadership/Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University*, 3(1), 1.
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. (2024): Women's Political Participation: Africa Barometer 2024 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2024-07/womens-political-participation-africa-barometer-2024.pdf>
- International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2020). *IMF Executive Board Approves a US\$226 Million Disbursement to Cameroon to Address the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020*. IMF. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/05/04/pr20205-cameroon-imf-exec-board-approves-us-226m-disbursement-address-impact-covid19-pandemic>. [Accessed 8 April 2021].
- International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2021). *IMF Annual Report 2021: Build Forward Better*. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/ar/2021/eng/downloads/imf-annual-report-2021.pdf>

- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). (2021). Women's political participation. *Africa Barometer 2021*.
- Jallah, D. K., Larsala, L. & Baah, K. I. (2021). *Factors hindering gender balance in the political participation of Liberia: Women as a victim*. Available at SSRN 3984379. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3984379>
- Kamlongera, A. P. (2008). Malawian women's participation in State politics: What are the constraints?. *Gender & Development*, 16(3), 471–480. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552070802465318>
- Kayuni, H. M. & Chikadza, K. F. (2016). The gatekeepers: Political participation of women in Malawi. *CMI Brief* 15(12), 1–4.
- Khattak, S. G. (2011). Feminism in education: Historical and contemporary issues of gender inequality in higher education. *Occasional Papers in Education & Lifelong Learning: An International Journal*, 5(1), 67–81.
- Kinge, R. F. (2016). Gender differentials in political participation in the south west region of Cameroon: the implications on women development. *Review of Public Administration and Management*, 400(3786), 1–14.
- Kinge, R. F. & Adepoju, O. A. (2014). Women education and political participation in the southwest region of Cameroon: an empirical analysis. *Public Administration Research*, 3(2), 144–153. <https://doi.org/10.5539/par.v3n2p144>
- Kodila–Tedika, O., Asongu, S. A. & Azia–Dimbu, F. (2017). Statistics and intelligence in developing countries: A note. *Journal of Biosocial Science*, 49(3), 309–321. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021932016000213>
- Krook, M. L. & Zetterberg, P. (2014). Introduction: Gender quotas and women's representation—new directions in research. *Representation*, 50(3), 287–294. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2014.951168>
- Kumar, S. & Gautam, S. (2019). Liberal feminist perspective in gender and education: A critique. *Our Heritage*, 67(4), 78–84.
- Liu, S. X. (2022). How war-related deprivation affects political participation: Evidence from education loss in Liberia. *Journal of Peace Research*, 59(3), 353–366. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433211019460>

- Loayza, N. & Trumbic, T. (2020) *Gender equality is smart economics. Yet, its progress remains slow*. World Bank. [Online]. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/gender-equality-smart-economics-yet-its-progress-remains-slow>. 2020. [Accessed 21 June 2023].
- Martinez, G. J. & Mellado, L. (2020). "How to Empower Female Politicians: The case of Morocco." [Online]. Available at: <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/articles/how-empower-female-politicians-case-morocco>. [Accessed 20 June 2023].
- Mouline, S., Ozlu, O. & Herzog, L. (2022). *A big step forward for women's leadership in Morocco*. World Bank, 19 January 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/big-step-forward-womens-leadership-morocco> [Accessed 21 June 2023].
- Muswere, A. (2020). Is Africa capable of achieving the sustainable development goals in the 2020–2030 decade of programming. *J Publ Admin Gov*, 10(4), 5372–5372. <https://doi.org/10.5296/jpag.v10i4.17209>
- Mvukiyehe, E. (2018). Promoting political participation in war-torn countries: Microlevel evidence from postwar Liberia. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62(8), 1686–1726. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002717698019>
- Naresh, S. (2008). The Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor. *The role of the environment in poverty alleviation*, 305–328.
- Ndung'u, N. & Signé, L. (2020). The Fourth Industrial Revolution and digitization will transform Africa into a global powerhouse. *Foresight Africa Report*, 5(1), 1–177.
- Nienaber, H. & Moraka, N. V. (2016). Feminism in management research: A route to justly optimise talent. *Acta Commercii*, 16(2), 139–163. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ac.v16i2.417>
- Nsaidzedze, S. B. (2020). *Digital Gender Divide and Political participation of women in Cameroon*. Denis and Lenora Foretia Foundation.
- Nyirawung, R. A., Ayilu, R. K., Suh, N. N., Ngwang, N. N., Varnie, F. & Loring, P. A. (2022). COVID-19 and small-scale fisheries in Africa: Impacts on livelihoods and the fish value chain in Cameroon and Liberia. *Marine Policy*, 141, 105104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2022.105104>



- Ojo, T. A. (2022). Digital financial inclusion for women in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: A key towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5. *Africa Review*, 14(1), 98–123. <https://doi.org/10.1163/09744061-20220204>
- O'Neil, T. & Domingo, P. (2016). *Women and power: Overcoming barriers to leadership and influence*. Overseas Development Institute, London.
- Ott, M. & Kanyongolo, F. E. (2009). *Democracy in progress: Malawi's 2009 parliamentary and presidential elections*. Kachere Series.
- Revenga, A. & Shetty, S. (2012). Empowering women is smart economics—closing gender gaps benefits countries as a whole, not just women and girls. *Finance and Development-English Edition*, 49(1), 40.
- Rodgers, Y. & Akram-Lodhi, H. (2019). *The gender gap in agricultural productivity in sub-Saharan Africa: causes, costs and solutions*. UN Women. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/04/the-gender-gap-in-agricultural-productivity-in-sub-saharan-africa>
- Sahu, D. T. K. & Yadav, K. (2018). Women's education and political participation. *International Journal of Advanced Education and Research*, 3(6), 65–71. <https://doi.org/10.22271/educatin.2018.v3.i6.15>
- Sawer, M. (2000). Parliamentary representation of women: From discourses of justice to strategies of accountability. *International Political Science Review*, 21(4), 361–380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512100214003>
- Schwab, K. (2017). *The fourth industrial revolution*. New York: Crown Publishing Group..
- Sikweyiya, Y., Addo-Lartey, A. A., Alangea, D. O., Dako-Gyeke, P., Chirwa, E. D., Coker-Appiah, D. ... & Jewkes, R. (2020). Patriarchy and gender-inequitable attitudes as drivers of intimate partner violence against women in the central region of Ghana. *BMC Public Health*, 20, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-08825-z>
- Singh, M. K. (1987). Participation of women in economic development—trends & issues. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, 23(1), 93–106.

- Spring, A. (2019). Putting women in the development agenda: agricultural development in Malawi. In: Brokensha, D. W. (ed.) *Anthropology of development and change in East Africa*, pp. 13–42. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429040696-2>
- Staudt, K. (1986). Women, development and the state: on the theoretical impasse. *Development and Change*, 17(2), 325–333. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.1986.tb00243.x>
- StatisticsTimes (2025). World Sex Ratio 1950–2025. Available at: <http://statisticstime.com/demographics/world-sex-ratio.php>
- Tadlaoui, G. (2021). *EU support for women’s political participation and leadership under the EU Gender Action: A case study on Morocco*. United Nations. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/desa/world%E2%80%99s-women-2020>
- Tong, R. & Botts, T. F. (2009). *Feminist thought: A more comprehensive introduction*. London: Routledge.
- United Nations (UN). (2009). *Legal Empowerment of the poor and eradication of poverty*. UN Secretary-General. [online]. Available from: <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/reports/Legal%20empowerment%20of%20the%20poor.pdf>.
- United Nations (UN). (2015). *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. UN. [Online]. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2021) *UNDP supports Gender stakeholders’ conference on women’s political participation in Liberia*. UNDP. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.lr.undp.org/content/liberia/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2021/undp-supports-gender-stakeholders-conference-on-women-s-politica.html>. [Accessed 20 June 2023].
- UN Women. (2024) *Women Political Leaders 2024*. <http://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/Poster-Women-political-leaders-2024-en.pdf>

## Chapter Seven

- World Bank. (2021a). *Unlocking Malawi's Economic Growth by Bridging the Widening Gender Gaps in the Labor Workforce*. World Bank. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/malawi/publication/unlocking-malawi-s-economic-growth-by-bridging-the-widening-gender-gaps-in-the-labour-workforce>. 2021.
- World Bank. (2021b). *The World Bank in Liberia*. World Bank. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/liberia/overview>. [Accessed 20 June 2022].





## Chapter Eight

# African Union and the Development of a Continental Gender Quota in Africa

**Zainab Monisola Olaitan** 

*Institute for Pan-African Thought and Conversation*  
*University of Johannesburg*   
*Johannesburg, South Africa*  
*zolaitan@uj.ac.za*

### Introduction

Scholars have debated the long-standing aim of gender quotas across the world, which is to ensure the inclusion of women in political positions at all levels (Olaitan & Isike, 2024; Dahlerup, 2005; Krook, 2006). These debates have often referred to quotas as an important mechanism towards ensuring women's participation in different spheres and achieving gender equality at large. It is interesting to note that the weaponisation of quotas as a mechanism for correcting the gender imbalance that exists within the decision-making sphere is a consequence of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action Women conference. This conference not only motivated the need for women to be involved in the public decision-making sphere, but it also tied the achievement of gender equality to the active participation of women in the political space (UN, 1995). This monumental event sparked a change in the discourse on gender equality and women's political representation across the globe. Therefore, enjoining countries to embrace the recommendations and discussions that erupted during this conference, particularly the inclusion of women in all decision-making spheres. This has manifested in more than 40 countries adopting one form of gender quota to ensure that women are rightfully included in the political system as active participants. This action has

yielded tremendous progress for the visibility of women in the political space, spurring scholars to argue that gender quotas are a fast-track mechanism to achieving gender representation in politics (Dahlerup, 2006).

While we can argue that the adoption of gender quotas is a global phenomenon, it is overreaching to assert that all African states have one form of gender quotas to actively ensure the inclusion of women (Olaitan, 2024). Out of the 54 countries in Africa, more than 40 have some form of gender quota, either legislative, voluntary, or reserved, which is encouraging. However, this does not translate to a high number of women in politics, as the continental average for women's political representation is still at 26%, which is below the 30% benchmark of women needed to be in the political space across the continent (Olaitan, 2024). Countries like Rwanda, South Africa, Ethiopia, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda have implemented gender quotas to facilitate the presence of women using active corrective instruments like quotas; other countries like Nigeria see no need to commit to this task. The above-mentioned countries that have adopted one form of quota have more than 30% of women in politics, which is more than the global benchmark, with Rwanda being the highest in the world, at 63%. This proves that gender quotas are an effective instrument for ensuring the participation of women in the political system; thus, there is a need to encourage other African countries to adopt them. From the highest, which is Rwanda at 63%, to the lowest, which is Nigeria at 4%, there is a disparity surrounding women's political participation in Africa requiring effort towards uniformity.

However, the responsibility of ensuring such uniformity primarily lies with the African Union (AU), which is the highest intergovernmental body for African countries on the continent. The African Union, in a bid to ensure increased women's political representation, adopted several regional instruments, the most notable of which are the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (AU, 2003) and the African Union's Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004) (AU, 2005). These two

instruments spell out the motivation for empowering women on the continent while suggesting corresponding recommendations to protect the rights of women. Nevertheless, to actively ensure that women across the continent are politically represented via active participation, the AU needs to take more active steps to ensure that all countries have some form of gender quotas. It is not enough for countries to verbally pledge or sign documents to ratify protocols; practical policies need to be put in place to actualise the continental representation of African women in the political space.

Therefore, this chapter engages the possibility of the African Union spearheading the development of a continental gender quota to address the under-representation of women in politics as well as to ensure their increased participation in the political system. To achieve this, the chapter employs a qualitative methodology and a thematic analytical framework as its methodology. Themes were generated from a review of literature that has been written on gender quotas and women's representation in Africa. Based on the themes generated, the chapter makes its analysis on why the AU needs to take a frontline position in advocating for and implementing a continental gender quota. It provides context on the under-representation of women in politics in Africa; it examines the efforts of international and regional bodies to address this problem. It discusses the possibility of gender quotas being the needed instrument to help to ensure the presence of women and lastly thematically argues for the AU to consider a continental quota for women in political positions.

### **Women's Political Participation in Africa: Challenges and Issues.**

In recent years, women's participation in politics and decision-making in Africa has received significant attention. However, several factors continue to limit their political participation despite evidence of why it is crucial to have them participate in political decision-making. These factors impede the efforts of African countries to achieve women's equal and effective

participation in political decision-making. Gender stereotypes, religious factors, and patriarchal socio-cultural norms that hinder women's empowerment remain prevalent (Olaitan, 2023a; Olaitan & Isike, 2019). Fundamental to the constraints that women face is an entrenched patriarchal system in which public decision-making powers are often seen to be the preserve of men. Sadie (2005) argues that "traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes, especially as regards women's roles and status in society, remain strong, particularly in rural areas" (cited in Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019:5). Roles and the division of labour in most African societies are still clearly gendered. These social norms make it more difficult for women to leave their traditional domestic roles for public roles outside of the home.

Women's gender identity is still predominantly conceived of as domestic and continues to hinder women's entry into formal politics (Kangas et al., 2015). Such a society, it is argued, is patriarchal because it accords men the dominant role and decision-maker status in the private and the public spheres (Olaitan 2023a; Olaitan 2020), while restricting women to the private space of home-keeping and limiting them to reproductive services in the public sphere (Gender Links, 2005). Going by this, it is not simply the case that women lack the will and attributes to participate in decision-making, but they are systematically discriminated against by entrenched patriarchal norms that limit their capabilities (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). When it comes to the political space, politics is often considered a male domain; very few women run for office because they feel that they will not have the support of their family or community. Even when women find the space to be outspoken or become community leaders, they are labelled as "troublemakers" in society because the right to speak or act is for men (Community of Democracies, 2017). The patriarchal constraints that these women face exist side-by-side with the democratic dispensation in most African countries, thereby proving that a society can be democratic while being completely patriarchal.

Another issue is the culture of political parties and the lack of dedicated political will, mainly from male-dominated leadership, in promoting women's political engagement work



(Community of Democracies, 2017). In support of this male political gatekeeping is a hostile media that places women on an unreasonably high standard compared to their male counterparts (International IDEA, 2021). In addition, the lack of adequate funding is a huge obstacle to women's political engagement, particularly in Africa. Female politicians spend less than their male counterparts on election campaigns because of a lack of adequate funding (International IDEA, 2024). In a continent where more than one in four persons remain undernourished and poor, with women being the first victims of this persistent poverty, it becomes natural for them to prioritise economic survival over political engagement. For instance, in Ghana, the two major parties, the NDC and the NPP, had to halve the filing fees for women candidates so that they could afford the forms, in recognition of the fact that women are often poorer (Madsen, 2019). However, the funds for campaigning are often exorbitant, and women are less likely to be able to generate the huge funds needed for campaigning. Madsen (2019) notes that women who have access to such funding tend to finance their campaigns through fundraising in their private and professional networks; private savings; and loans and gifts, which often come with the expectation of favours in return. Other issues that affect women's political participation are the political machinery responsible for promoting and enforcing gender equality in most African countries is weak, often because of low human resource capacity coupled with the absence of a legal framework with strong oversight. There has been limited signing, ratification, implementation, and enforcement of treaties and protocols on gender equality and women's empowerment in some African countries (Community of Democracies, 2017).

The 2005 election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as president of Liberia was an important milestone in women's political participation in Africa (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 2007, 4). This has led to the election of other women heads of state in recent times; for example, Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania in 2021 and Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah of Namibia in 2024. The participation of women on the continent has to some extent enjoyed a boost, with countries like South

Africa, Ethiopia, and Rwanda raising the continental average. While certain countries have increased women's political participation, in other African countries, women hold less than 20% of political positions. For instance, Nigeria, Guinea-Bissau, and the Gambia have less than 10% of women in their lower legislative house. In fact, amongst women ministers, the most common portfolios are family, children, youth, elderly, handicapped, social affairs, women's affairs, gender equality, and education (Olaitan, 2023b; UNECA, 2007:5). This proves that women are given tokenistic positions and are still not accorded a place of prominence in politics and governance, particularly in Africa.

International IDEA (2024) reported that the average percentage of women's political participation in national parliaments increased from 25% in 2021 to 26% in 2024. This average is further disaggregated into women in the lower house at 26% and women in the upper house at 21%, meaning that women constitute about a quarter of the 13,057 parliamentarians in Africa. While local government is often hailed as a training ground for women in politics, women constitute a mere 25% of councillors (International IDEA, 2024:6). Women, particularly young women and women from marginalised groups, report that they have difficulty engaging in or influencing the policy process in their countries. They face a variety of barriers to their participation in politics and decision-making discriminatory political structures, as well as social, economic, and cultural barriers (International IDEA, 2024).

In the face of the various obstacles that bedevil the participation of women in politics, it is important to reiterate the importance of women's political participation to achieving gender equality. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 emphasised that:

“Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the perspective of women

at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development, and peace cannot be achieved.” (UN, 1995:1)

To actualise this, the Platform for Action defined two strategic objectives, which are “ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in all power structures and decision-making; and increase women’s capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership” (Ibid).

### **Previous Efforts Aimed at Increasing Women’s Political Participation in Africa.**

Over the past two decades, significant commitments to women’s participation in decision-making have been made at the international level, notable of which is the 1995 Platform for Action. The Beijing Platform for Action (UN, 1995) called on governments to take measures to ensure women’s equal access to, and full participation in, power structures and decision-making (UN, 1995). There is also the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000, which reiterated the need to increase the representation of women (UN, 2000). Article 7 of the CEDAW (UN, 1979) specifically addresses the elimination of gender discrimination in political and public life, stating: “States parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right: To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government; To participate in non-governmental organisations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country” (UN, 1979, 1).

Subsequently, in 1997 the CEDAW Committee issued General Recommendation 23 to elaborate on Article 7, making a stronger case for measures such as gender quotas to achieve equality of participation. The recommendation states that the “formal removal of barriers and the introduction of temporary

special measures to encourage the equal participation of men and women in the public life of their societies are essential prerequisites to true equality in political life” (UN, 1997:1). This recommendation enjoins the active cooperation of states, political parties, and relevant stakeholders in ensuring women’s full and effective participation.

In Africa, several frameworks related to women’s political participation in Africa have been adopted, which are as follows: Article 4 (1) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, the Dakar Platform for Action (AU, 1994); the African Plan of Action to facilitate the Implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action for the Advancement of Women (UN, 1995); the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (AU, 2003); and the African Union’s Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (AU, 2004). Moreover, the AU as an organisation has made progress in terms of women’s representation in its commissions; for example, as of 2007, women occupied 50% of the leadership of the African Union’s Commission (UNECA, 2007). The African Union held a conference in 2007 to discuss popularising and implementing its 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, thereby reiterating its commitment to gender parity. The African Union Women, Gender Development Directorate (WGDD) is responsible for the actualisation of gender equality goals on the continent while holding member states accountable for their gender mainstreaming efforts. Sub-regional institutions, such as the East African Legislative Assembly, have internal regulations that mandate women’s participation (UNECA, 2007:3). The governments of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) committed to ensuring that women occupy at least 30% of the positions in political and decision-making structures. There are also women’s networks associated with a variety of sub-regions that push for women’s political participation.

Of these efforts, the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, often referred to as the Maputo Protocol (AU, 2003), appears to be Africa’s most progressive legal instrument, providing a comprehensive set of human

rights for African women. Owiso and Sefah (2017:2) assert that “Article 9 of the Protocol on the Rights of Women obliges African states to take specific positive action to ensure participation by women in governance and political life.” The article provides that “States parties shall take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through affirmative action, enabling national legislation, and other measures to ensure that: (a) women participate without any discrimination in all elections; (b) women are represented equally at all levels with men in all electoral processes; (c) women are equal partners with men at all levels of development and implementation of state policies and development programmes. States parties shall ensure increased and effective representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making.” (AU, 2003, Article 9). The Protocol is the authoritative instrument on women’s right to political participation in Africa, such that Thabane and Buthelezi (2009) call it the most progressive and defiant women’s rights instrument. Also, the African Democracy Charter sought to adapt the broad provisions of the African Women’s Rights Protocol on women’s participation by including amongst its objectives and principles “the promotion of citizen’s participation in public affairs, the promotion of representative government systems, and the promotion of gender equality and balance in governance and development processes” (AU, 2012: Article 8). To achieve the above objectives, the African Democracy Charter mandatorily obligates states to “take concrete steps such as eliminating gender-based discrimination; adopting legislative and administrative measures to guarantee the rights of women (including the right to participation); creating conditions to ensure full and active participation of women in decision-making at all levels; and taking all possible measures to encourage women to participate fully and actively in the electoral process and to ensure gender parity in representation at all levels, particularly in Parliament” (AU, 2012:Article 29).

Despite these legal frameworks, UN Women confirms that “around the world as well as in Africa, women’s leadership

and political participation are restricted. Women are under-represented as voters, as well as in leading positions, whether in elected office, the civil service, the private sector, or academia” (UN Women, 2022:1). They further argue that this under-representation occurs despite their proven abilities as leaders and agents of change and their right to participate equally in democratic governance. And because of these various issues, women remain seriously underrepresented in decision-making positions across the continent. Eliane Hervo-Akendengué, Public Information Officer of the United Nations Operations in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI), cautioned that “the election of Madame Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President of Liberia and the dedication of President Kagame of Rwanda to women’s decision-making can give the impression that mentalities have changed on the continent; however, much remains to be achieved (UNECA, 2007). This confirms the point that having frameworks and policies in place is not in itself enough to facilitate women’s political participation. While the majority of African countries are party to several international treaties and charters on gender equality and promoting women’s rights, these agreements and obligations are often not adopted or ratified, and for those that have, implementation is often slow or absent altogether.

### **Gender Quotas and Women’s Political Participation in Africa**

Gender quotas have been adjudged to be the single most effective policy tool to ensure increased participation of women in politics. Krook (2006) argues that quotas have become popular because of their status as a viable solution to the under-representation of women in electoral politics. This is in the face of numerous countries having reformed their constitutions or passed new electoral laws to ensure that women comprise certain percentages of aspirants, candidates, or legislative seats, while in many other countries, political parties have adopted quotas on their own (Dahlerup, 2006). Krook confirms that “political parties in more than 90 countries today have imposed some form of gender quota for elections to the national parliament, either as a part of their party statutes or in response

to changes in the constitution or the electoral law” (2006:113). Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2005:408) contend that “this rapid adoption and diffusion of gender quotas has been labelled the fast-track to equal representation.” This widespread adoption of quotas “raises both normative and empirical questions, ranging from whether gender quotas are appropriate to why countries adopt them and how effective they have been across the world” (Schwindt-Bayer, 2007:289). Mansbridge (2005:622) asserts that the most practical and effective way to increase women’s political participation is through gender quotas. Pande and Ford (2011:11) note that quotas can foster more equitable women’s political representation when the working of the political system limits the possibility of women occupying political positions because “they can bypass discrimination by directly mandating that certain positions be reserved for women.” Mansbridge (2005) argues that significant representation by gender cannot be achieved in any existing polity without some form of quota. Therefore, quotas play a crucial democratic role in increasing gender equality. To support this, Dahlerup asserts that gender quotas represent a redistribution of power and the recognition of women’s under-representation as a democratic problem (Dahlerup, 2008:323).

In 1990, the UN Economic and Social Council set a 30% benchmark for women’s representation in the decision-making sphere in response to an active civil society movement and increasing awareness of women’s rights (Pande & Ford, 2011:6). By 1995, the Beijing Conference on Women took it further by motivating quota policies by calling for governments to “ensure equal representation of women at all decision-making levels in national and international institutions” (UN, 1995:1). Specifically, the 2021 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 65 agreed conclusions focus on strengthening normative, legal, and regulatory frameworks for achieving gender parity. Baldez (2006:104) states that “gender quotas come with the approval of the international community, the imprimatur of other modern democracies, such as Sweden, France, and Argentina, and the expertise of a vast network of advocates and practitioners worldwide.” She further confirms that quotas

work, and they work quickly under the right conditions. Given this global environment, political quotas began to emerge as a viable and popular policy option in countries worldwide (Baldez, 2006). Also, Dahlerup (2008) notes that the diffusion of quota laws and parties' adoption of gender quotas have pointed to the importance of pressure from above combined with pressure from below. Undoubtedly, the "international community, and especially the UN World Women's Conference in 1995, provided legitimacy for quota claims put forward by national women's organisations and groups" (ibid.:323). An examination of the top 20 countries with high women's political participation shows that most of them have some form of gender quota in place (Olaitan, 2024).

Several studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of gender quotas in enhancing increased women's political representation in Global South countries (Olaitan, 2023b). Dahlerup asserts that countries such as South Africa, Costa Rica, and Argentina challenged the previous statistics held by Scandinavian countries, with Rwanda currently having the highest share of women in parliament in the entire world (ibid.:2005:9; International IDEA, 2024). Africa has witnessed the adoption of a wide variety of quota schemes over the past decades. In South Africa, the African National Congress introduced voluntary quotas in the first post-apartheid democratic elections in 1994 and is considered the pioneer for voluntary party quotas on the continent (Dahlerup, 2005; Olaitan, 2024). Uganda took the lead in introducing reserved seats in 1986, and this experiment has since been replicated in other East African countries (Kethusegile-Juru, 2004). Interestingly, reserved quotas have been the most successful in guaranteeing an increase in women's political representation to a particular target level. However, "many countries set the target for reserved seats below the UN recommended quota level of 30%, which results in lower levels of female representation than in countries with higher targets" (Pande & Ford, 2011:13). For example, Djibouti and Niger have 10% reserved seats for women, which is below the UN-recommended 30% benchmark. Other countries such as Burundi, Uganda, and Eritrea have



set higher levels of 30% and above, “which contributed to a dramatic increase of women leaders associated with legislation of reserved seats at either the national or sub-national level.” While higher levels of representation in these countries cannot solely be attributed to gender quotas, it is, however, normal to posit that countries open to women’s political participation are likely to implement quotas (ibid:14).

One common feature of quotas in Africa is that they have been introduced in post-conflict contexts and under the influence of international donors. In these situations, quotas are used to address gender imbalances and achieve social justice and equality. They represent a critical first step in allowing women access to a platform that they had often historically been marginalised from. And as we can see, this has resulted in a steady increase in women’s political representation in Africa over the last two decades. It is interesting to note that even pseudo-democratic states have adopted some form of gender quota to accelerate women’s political participation. Notwithstanding, the increased participation of women in non-traditional roles, such as in post-genocide Rwanda, is a major factor for the introduction of gender quotas in the political system (Ballington, 2004). Although the introduction of quotas in Africa has been successful in terms of increasing women’s representation, most researchers and feminist movements have been critical in their evaluation. This is because “all too often actual political strategies are collapsed into a single demand for gender quotas” without countries putting in place practical instruments to actualise women’s political participation (Dahlerup, 2008:327).

### **Countries That Have Gender Quotas in Africa**

As of 2003, 19 African countries had adopted some form of legislative quotas for women. Countries like Angola had plans to adopt quotas, while the likes of Gambia, Kenya, and Nigeria have only engaged in debates on quotas (Ballington, 2004). Prior to the Beijing Conference of 1995, which led to widespread diffusion of gender quotas, only three African countries had adopted them. In those African countries with quotas, 17% of

legislative seats were held by women, compared with 9% of seats in countries without quotas (Kethusegile-Juru, 2004). African countries with reserved seats of over 20% or where the ruling party quotas of over 20% were able to increase women's political participation to 23%. During 2003, a number of countries with quotas had just emerged from civil wars (Eritrea, Mozambique, Rwanda, Somalia, and Uganda) or wars of liberation (Namibia and South Africa), which enabled them to draw up new constitutions and re-establish their parliaments from scratch (ibid).

Data from International IDEA (2024) shows that 41 African countries have adopted mandatory, voluntary, or reserved seat quotas to increase the presence of women in politics. Different forms of quotas were adopted. For example, some African countries have constitutionally mandated quotas (Rwanda, Tanzania), others have voluntary political party quotas (South Africa, Mozambique), and Uganda notably uses a reserved seats quota system. This shows that the use of quotas, particularly at the national level, is expanding in Africa. Many of the countries with quotas have the most active women's movements in Africa (Rwanda, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda), while approximately one-third of the countries have relatively weak women's movements (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, and Djibouti) or very low women's political participation in countries that do not have them (Nigeria). Indeed, quotas have been instrumental in mainstreaming women into politics in Africa even though the situation is not the same across the continent, as some countries do not have a quota system in place (International IDEA, 2022; Olaitan, 2024). This uneven adoption of quotas puts the continental average for women's political representation below 30%, even though countries like Rwanda and South Africa have more than 40% of women participating, hence the need for a continental gender quota.

## **Why the AU needs to spearhead the development of continental gender quotas**

To motivate the necessity for the AU to intervene in the development of the continental gender quota, this section examines factors that make it imperative for there to be practical instruments that enjoin states to provide quotas for women to be represented in political positions.

### **Variation in Electoral Systems**

A major reason for the AU to implement a continental gender quota is the variation in the electoral systems of its member states. Olaitan (2023b) notes that the success of any quota system is largely dependent on the type of electoral system that is in place. Also, the type of electoral system in many parts of the world is said to influence women's ability to gain legislative representation. Olaitan and Isike (2024) argue that it is easier for quotas to work in a proportional representation system than in a simple majority system. Electoral systems and affirmative action for women's political participation, often referred to as temporary special measures, play an important role in fostering increased women's political representation. International IDEA (2024:15) explains that women are better represented in countries with the Proportional Representation (PR) than the First Past the Post (FPTP) system or a mixture of the two systems.

It is easier for gender quotas to work in a proportional representation than in a simple majority electoral system because of the power that parties have over the composition of the electoral list. There is typically a higher proportion of women in the PR seats than in the FPTP. Quotas "are more usually used in conjunction with the PR than with the FPTP system. The PR system, sometimes referred to as the list system, is seen as strong on inclusion but weak on accountability" (Kethusegile-Juru, 2004:23). Internationally, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that women stand a better chance of becoming elected under the PR as opposed to the constituency electoral system. The reason for this is that in the latter case, candidates

focus on the party and its policies rather than on a particular individual. This works in favour of women – at least in placing their foot in the door because of the in-built prejudices against women in politics. The chance of women becoming elected is even higher when the PR system works in concert with a quota (International IDEA, 2024). This brings to the fore a major reason why most countries practising the FPTP system have relatively fewer women in politics, caused by the difficulty of women being voted in by the electorate as solo candidates.

This is in comparison to the PR system, where the party is voted for; hence, women can benefit from such a broader process. For instance, parties in South Africa find it easy to have voluntary quotas whereby they agree on the percentage of women to be included in their nomination list. Whereas parties in Nigeria will find it difficult to achieve this because of the complexity of the FPTP system whereby the focus is more on the individuals rather than the parties. Making quotas work in the FPTP system is fraught with many challenges. This is because in the winner-takes-all system, no matter what the stipulated number of women candidates, there is no guarantee that they will win unless they are fielded in constituencies where they are likely to win, which could be misconstrued as interference with the democratic process. Similarly, if constituencies are reserved for women only, this can be deemed as unfair. In such situations, it would seem like a legislated or constitutional quota is the best way to ensure the implementation of any sort of affirmative action for women to be included in the political system (Olaitan, 2024). This difference in the electoral system makes it imperative for there to exist some form of uniformity regarding gender quotas in Africa. Not necessarily that all countries adopt, say, voluntary quotas, but that it is recommended for all countries to have one form of quota, be it constitutional or voluntary.

## **Lack of Proper Implementation of Regional Instruments on Gender**

The AU and the UN have passed numerous international and regional instruments to ensure that women are properly represented either in politics or in the peace and security sphere. However, the problem lies in the implementation of these instruments, whereby there is an imbalance in how the spirit of the instrument is actualised. For instance, the Maputo Protocol duly provides that women should be protected and treated with dignity in African society; however, restrictive cultural norms and traditions often serve as hindrances to this. A largely patriarchal society is likely not to abide by the provisions made under the Maputo Protocol that women should be seen as equal beings and not be accorded secondary status. This permeates into how the states work towards implementing these instruments.

The responsibility to implement some of these regional instruments is often marred with inconsistencies, as some states might exert more effort and resources than others, creating uneven progress regarding how the instrument is working across the continent. Considering that the protocol needs to be incorporated into domestic law to be implemented at a national level, not all African countries have domesticated all aspects of the Maputo Protocol, meaning “that this continental instrument which meets the international standards of locating women’s rights within the ambit of fundamental human rights is in danger of becoming a paper tiger, irrelevant to the lived reality of women” (Muhammed, 2014, cited in Sigsworth & Kumalo, 2016:4). The Maputo Protocol is not implemented in any systematic or uniform manner across the continent; this is “because the protocol is non-binding and relies on the political will of individual member states for its implementation” (Sigsworth & Kumalo, 2016:4). Hence, the AU cannot bank on such inconsistency by its member states to adopt gender quotas at their own pace.

## **Development of a Continental Gender Quota**

The African Union is well-placed to develop gender quotas that will be embraced by all its 54 member states to ensure the inclusion of women in the political space. The AU should make sure that the quota is tailored to address the differences in the electoral system being practised across the continent. Holistically, the AU should recommend that countries have legislative or constitutional gender quotas that provide for more than 30% of women to be elected or nominated to political positions. This can either be through party nomination lists or reservation, whereby women are afforded reserved seats in the parliament or cabinet of the countries. Legislative quotas are quite effective, as they use the authority of the Constitution to achieve affirmative action for women in politics. States with proportional representation can use the constitutional quota to mandate all parties to have a certain percentage reserved for women on their party nomination list. For states with FPTP, the legislative quotas provide that a certain percentage of women must be reflected in the parliament or executive cabinet.

Quotas aim to ensure that women are represented in political offices rather than in the electoral process because the latter does not guarantee that these women will be elected to political positions, hence the need for the former. A party in an FPTP can have lots of women across different constituencies, yet these women may not be voted into power because of the inherent patriarchal norms that hinder the participation of women in public spheres, rearing their heads through the voting system. Also, using a voluntary quota in an FPTP is risky because women's representation may decline if the popularity of the party declines. The UN and Beijing Platform for Action benchmark of 30% can be adopted as a starting point to enjoin compliance by states, though it is justified if 50% is put as the benchmark, as women constitute 51% of the African population and parity is necessary. Building on the back of the provisions of Article 9 of the Maputo Protocol, the AU can make gender quotas important regional instruments to be employed to address the low participation and representation in politics. States will be

required to sign and ratify this instrument just like the Maputo Protocol to motivate majority compliance with the provision.

### **Delimit a Time Frame for the Implementation of the Quota**

To further ensure that states comply with the provision, a time frame should be set within which member states are to sign, ratify, and implement the 30% gender quotas in their respective constitutions. The essence of this time frame is to motivate states to prioritise the implementation of the quotas without having to drag out the process of signing, ratification, and implementation. The existence of a time frame symbolises importance and in a way spurs commitment towards the actualisation of the goal. The commitment of states is important to the success of the gender quotas, as the AU is only a body that is limited in its authority over its member states. Hence, the AU needs to work closely with states to ensure that they understand the need for a gender quota to show commitment towards the protection of women's interests and gender equality, rather than the stale lip service that has been practised over the years. A period of four to five years can be given to ensure that states adopt the 30% gender quotas into their constitution; this period gives room for a long and rigorous constitutional amendment process.

### **Establish a Review and Monitoring Mechanism to Enforce Compliance.**

Efforts at developing a continental gender quota will not be complete if there is no framework to measure the compliance of states and the effectiveness of the instrument. Just like the AU peer review system, there should be a monitoring mechanism that supervises the effort of individual member states to implement the gender quota via constitutional amendment. Compliance is more likely if states understand that there will be a review process to oversee their efforts at entrenching the quota in their constitution. The review process should include periodic monitoring and evaluation performed by the office of the WGDD, as well as a reporting system whereby member states submit reports on the progress made. This allows for a

two-way review method where states inform the AU of their progress thus far while the AU ascertains the authenticity of the efforts that states have put into ensuring the actualisation of the gender quota. The review process ensures that states are accountable and committed to the process wherein, in the event that a state is lagging, feedback as to how other states have fared might motivate them to put in the needed efforts to implement the quota. As the main office in charge of gender issues, the women and gender development directorate should be actively involved in this process.

### Conclusion

In a bid to contribute to the discourse on increasing women's political participation in Africa, this chapter argued for the development of a continental gender quota championed by the African Union. It started out by extensively discussing the low representation of women in the African political space, with countries like Nigeria and Ghana still having below 20% of women in the political system. This under-representation is attributable to a number of reasons ranging from the patriarchal norms and traditions inherent in most African states, the financial difficulty that women face when venturing into politics compared to their male counterparts, as well as the structural barriers that impede their participation in decision-making spheres. All these factors work together to keep women from participating in politics, although some countries in Africa have found a way to address this problem via gender quotas. Gender quotas have been proven to be a fast track to women's political participation in politics, with several countries adopting one form of quota or the other. It is in this vein that this chapter explored how the African Union can adopt gender quotas to foster increased participation of women in African politics.

It argues that it is not enough for countries to pledge that they will ensure increased participation of women in politics, the AU should take the frontline in implementing practical instruments towards this goal. The chapter made its findings using a thematic analysis framework; it explained that factors such as variations in the electoral system and lack of proper



implementation of previous regional instruments that advance gender parity make it important for there to be a specific instrument to push for increased participation of women in politics. The adoption of a continental gender quota allows for uniformity in an effort to ensure women's participation in politics while also enjoining states to embrace the need for more active and practical steps. It notes that the AU must achieve more than just developing the gender quotas; it needs to set a time frame within which states must adopt it as well as a review system where states' efforts will be evaluated. It recognises that certain challenges still bedevil the AU as an institution, such as a lack of cohesive authoritative power to compel member states. However, in this case, rather than compel, the AU should sensitise states on the need to ensure that the continent has increased women's political representation. This sensitisation, along with the conscious adoption of a gender quota, will yield positive results for women's political participation. If properly implemented, African states will be accurately placed in the discourse on achieving increased presence of women in politics as well as the broader goal of achieving gender equality.

## References

- African Union (AU). (1994). *Constitutive Act of the African Union*. AU. [Online]. Available at: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/34873-file-constitutiveact\\_en.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/34873-file-constitutiveact_en.pdf)
- African Union (AU). (2003). *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*. AU. [Online]. Available at: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37077-treaty-charter\\_on\\_rights\\_of\\_women\\_in\\_africa.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37077-treaty-charter_on_rights_of_women_in_africa.pdf)
- African Union (AU). (2004). *Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa*. Available at: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38956-doc-assembly\\_au\\_decl\\_12\\_iii\\_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/38956-doc-assembly_au_decl_12_iii_e.pdf)
- African Union (AU). (2005). *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*. AU. [Online]. Available at: [https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37077-treaty-charter\\_on\\_rights\\_of\\_women\\_in\\_africa.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/37077-treaty-charter_on_rights_of_women_in_africa.pdf)

- African Union (AU). (2012). *African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance*. AU. [Online]. Available at: <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-democracy-elections-and-governance>
- Baldez, L. (2006). The pros and cons of gender quota laws: What happens when you kick men out and let women in? *Politics and Gender*, 2(1), 102–109. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X06221019>
- Ballington, J. (ed.) (2004). *The implementation of quotas: African experiences*. Quota Report Series. International IDEA. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/implementation-of-quotas-african-experiences.pdf>
- Communities of Democracies. (2017). *Advancing Women’s Political Participation: African Consultation on Gender Equality and Political Empowerment*. [Online]. Available at: <https://community-democracies.org/app/uploads/2017/09/WPP-African-Consultation.pdf>
- Dahlerup, D. (2005). Increasing women’s political representation: New trends in gender quotas. In: Ballington, J. & Karam, A. (eds.) *Women in parliament: Beyond numbers*, pp: 141–153. Stockholm, Sweden: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA).
- Dahlerup, D. (2006). *Women, quotas, and politics*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Dahlerup, D. (2008). Gender quotas: Controversial but trendy. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 10(3), 322–328. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616740802185643>
- Dahlerup, D. & Freidenvall, L. (2005). Quotas as a ‘fast track’ to equal political representation for women: Why Scandinavia is no longer the model. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7(1), 26–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461674042000324673>
- Gender Links. (2005). *What is Keeping Women Out of Politics?* *Gender in South African Politics*. Ringing Up the Changes Fact Sheet, No. 3.
- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). (2024). *Africa Barometer: Women’s Political Participation*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. IDEA. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2024-07/womens-political-participation-africa-barometer-2024.pdf>

- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance  
(International IDEA). (2022). *Gender Quotas Database*. IIDEA.  
[Online]. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/quotas>
- Kangas, A., Haider, H. & Fraser, E. (2014). *Gender: Topic guide*. Revised edition with E. Browne. Birmingham: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, UK. [Online]. Available at: <https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/gender.pdf>
- Kethusegile-Juru, M. (2004). Quota Systems in Africa: An Overview. In: Ballington, J. (ed.) *The implementation of quotas: African experiences*. Quota Report Series, International IDEA. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/implementation-of-quotas-african-experiences.pdf>
- Krook, M. (2006). Gender quotas, norms and politics. *Politics and Gender*, 2(1) pp 110–118. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X06231015>
- Madsen, D. (2019). *Women's Political Representation and Affirmative Action in Ghana*. Nordic Africa Institute Policy Note No. 1. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet/The Nordic Africa Institute, January 2019. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1284607/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Mansbridge, J. (2005). Quota problems: Combating the dangers of essentialism. *Politics & Gender*, 1(4), 622–638. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X05220196>
- Mlambo, C. & Kapingura, F. (2019). Factors influencing women's political participation: The case of the SADC region. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 5(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2019.1681048>
- Olaitan, Z. (2020). *Analysis of Women's Participation in Peacebuilding in West Africa: The Case of Sierra Leone*. Master's dissertation, University of Pretoria.
- Olaitan, Z. (2023a). Feminist rethinking of the representation of African women in peacebuilding: A theoretical analysis. *African Journal of Gender, Society and Development*, 12(1), 185–207. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3622/2023/v12n1a9>
- Olaitan, Z. (2023b). *Gender Quotas and the Substantive Representation of Women in African Politics: Case Studies of Botswana and South Africa*. PhD thesis, University of Pretoria.

- Olaitan, Z. (2024). *Women's representation in African politics: Beyond numbers*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-76051-8>
- Olaitan, Z. & Isike, C. (2019). The role of the African Union in fostering women's representation in formal peacebuilding: A case study of Sierra Leone. *Journal of African Union Studies*, 8(2), 135–154. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2050-4306/2019/8n2a8>
- Olaitan, Z. & Isike, C. (2024). Gender quotas as a mechanism for engendering political transformation in Africa. *The African Review*, 1–21.
- Owiso, R. & Sefah, B. (2017). Actualising women's participation in politics and governance in Africa: the case of Ghana and Kenya. *African Human Rights Yearbook*, 1(2017), 263–289. <https://doi.org/10.29053/2523-1367/2017/v1n1a13>
- Pande, R. & Ford, D. (2011). *Gender Quotas and Female Leadership*. World Bank Development Report Background Chapter on Gender Equality and Development. World Bank. [Online]. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstreams/1d4402bd-40ce-58d6-a79a-b8f71704f44e/download>
- Sadie, Y. (2005). Women in political decision-making in the SADC region. *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity Women and Leadership*, 19(65), 17–31.
- Schwindt-Bayer, L. A. (2007). Review of women, quotas, and politics. Edited by Drude Dahlerup. *Politics and Gender*, 3(2), 289–291. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X0700013X>
- Sigsworth, R. & Kumalo, L. (2016). *Women, Peace, and Security; Implementing the Maputo Protocol in Africa*. Institute for Security Studies, Chapter 295.
- Thabane, T. & Buthelezi, M. (2008). Bridging the gap between de jure and de facto parliamentary representation of women in Africa. *Comparative and International Law Journal of Southern Africa*, 41(2), 175–204.
- United Nations (UN). (1979). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. UN. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cedaw.pdf>.

## Chapter Eight

- United Nations (UN). 1995. *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. UN. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.
- United Nations (UN). (1997). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women General Recommendations No. 23*. Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm?fbclid=IwAR3lQYxyXUHbVdk5i4lhxAIEPZTVdozLZ-yRO8aCu7nsMnJ5NZJjzHJLu3w>
- United Nations (UN). (2000). *Five-year Review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing + 5)*. UN. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/beijing+5.htm>
- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). (2007). *Report on Online Discussion on Women, Political Participation, and Decision-Making in Africa*. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). [Online]. Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/TechnicalCooperation/docs/Online%20Discussion%20Report%20Africa%20FINAL.pdf>
- United Nations Women (UN Women). (2022). *Leadership and Political Participation*. UN Women. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation>.





## Chapter Nine

# African Women's Land Rights Struggle in Traditional Societies

**Lesego Louisah Mosweu** 

*Centre for Race, Gender and Class,  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa  
Lmosweu54@gmail.com*

**Tinuade Adekunbi Ojo** 

*Centre for Race, Gender and Class,  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa  
tinuadeo@uj.ac.za*

### Introduction

Culture plays a critical role in shaping the dynamics of African societies, including how access to land is organised and regulated. It influences values, belief systems, behaviours, and decision-making processes, providing communities with a sense of meaning and purpose. Culture can offer ethical frameworks that guide the behaviour of its members and foster social cohesion. However, when manipulated through patriarchal structures, it can entrench inequalities and undermine the rights of specific groups, particularly women. Cultural traditions have often been used to subordinate women, perpetuating harmful practices that affect their well-being and limit their ability to claim land (Durojaye & Adebajo, 2014; Iryana, 2023).

Within traditional societies, men empowered by patriarchal norms often exert control over women, reinforcing systemic inequality. This manipulation has contributed to

the persistence of human rights abuses, especially in African contexts where women are frequently denied equal access to land and other resources (Chipenda & Tom, 2022). Land remains one of the most contested resources in South Africa, and struggles over access reflect broader issues of power, identity, and gender.

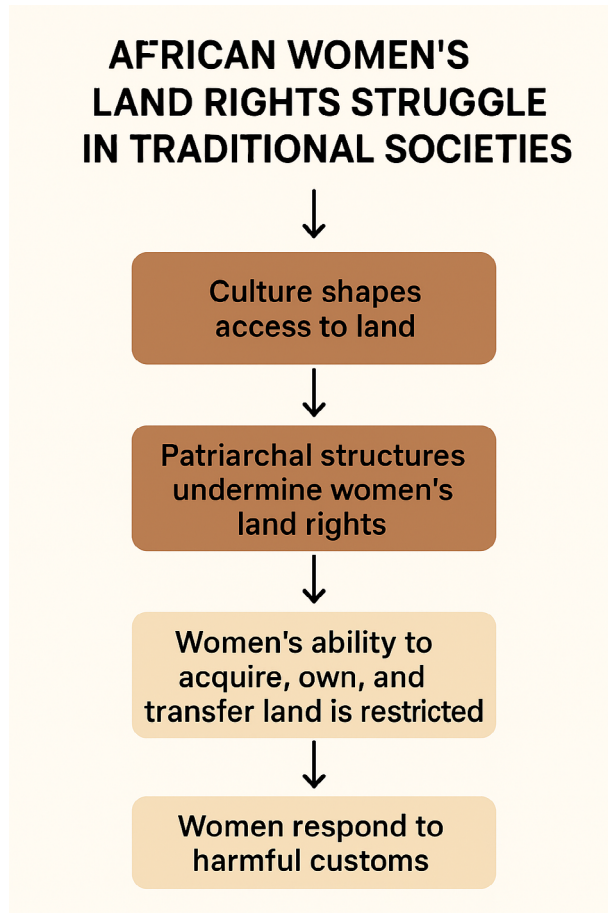


**Figure 1:** African Women's Land Struggle in Traditional Societies. Source: Authors, 2025.

This chapter argues that traditional practices remain a significant barrier to women's land rights in South Africa,



as they restrict women's ability to acquire, own, and transfer land. Such practices have historically marginalised women and continue to reinforce gender inequality in rural and customary settings. Building on this argument, the chapter examines the specific challenges women face under traditional systems, considers the impact of policy interventions, and explores how women have responded to harmful customs. The discussion draws on secondary qualitative research, using books, academic journals, and newspaper articles. By examining the intersection of traditional practices, patriarchy, and women's land rights, this chapter contributes to ongoing debates on land reform and gender justice in Africa, highlighting the structural barriers women face and the strategies they employ to resist marginalisation in traditional societies.

### **Women's Challenges to Land Access in Traditional Settings**

Culture and tradition, while often used interchangeably, are distinct concepts. Culture refers to the shared practices, beliefs, values, and norms within a group or society, which evolve over time through communal participation and adaptation. As these cultural practices persist, they transform into traditions amalgamated from a mixture of ideologies, practices, and beliefs (Tri, 2024), becoming deeply embedded in the social fabric of a community. The concept of tradition, therefore, reflects a process of inheritance, where memories, stories, values, and identities are passed down from one generation to the next (Bevir, 2000). While traditions are commonly perceived as natural and immutable, they are subject to change over time. Societies may reject, modify, or extend certain traditions in response to new values, challenges, or social movements (Bevir, 2000).

In many African societies, control and access to land are central to women's socioeconomic development. However, women in these contexts often face significant barriers to equal access to land, particularly in traditional settings where gender dynamics reinforce male dominance. While land ownership

and access are crucial for economic empowerment, the cultural practices that govern these rights frequently marginalise women, depriving them of their rightful ownership and control over resources. Many harmful cultural practices are rooted in the belief that men are superior to women, leading to the distortion of genuine cultural customs into practices that justify the exploitation of women (Msuya, 2019). In these patriarchal settings, the perpetuation of traditional norms impedes meaningful progress for women, reinforcing gender inequality and limiting their opportunities for advancement.

Customary law, which is often based on traditional beliefs, perpetuates patriarchal structures by designating men as the rightful owners and guardians of land. This system marginalises women, denying them the rights to acquire, own, or use land in ways that could benefit them and their communities (Msuya, 2019). In these contexts, women's rights to land are consistently undermined, leading to broader social and economic inequalities. The persistent marginalisation of women in land ownership is not only unjust but also detrimental to the wider society, as it hampers the full potential of half of the population. Without access to land, women cannot secure their livelihoods, support their families, or contribute to the economic development of their communities in meaningful ways.

Given these barriers, land inheritance through marriage has become a critical means by which women can gain access to land. Widows, for example, may retain the right to use their deceased husband's land under certain conditions, such as not remarrying (Wily, 2011). However, this right is often limited, and widows face numerous restrictions. If a widow has male children, she must share the land with them, diminishing her ownership rights (Bunelli et al., 2015). Furthermore, divorced women lose their right to use their former husband's land, highlighting the gendered nature of land access in many African societies. The issue lies in the fact that women are often unable to fully enjoy their land rights because of entrenched traditional practices, such as the male primogeniture rule, which dictates that males are the rightful heirs of a deceased person's estate (Human Rights Watch, 2017). This rule perpetuates the notion

that men are superior to women and reinforces the exclusion of women from land ownership and inheritance.

The subordination of women in African societies was further entrenched by colonial forces, which codified harmful cultural practices into formal legal frameworks under customary law. During the apartheid era in South Africa, for example, the state's legal system reinforced male dominance by transferring the property of deceased men to local authorities, where male chiefs or village authorities managed it. Under the legal framework established by colonialism, women had little say in the management or distribution of property. As stated in the 1927 South African Union Act, movable property of a deceased man was to be "administered under native law and custom," (Black Administration Act 38 of 1927) often without regard for the woman with whom he had lived. This system ensured that women were excluded from inheriting property, reinforcing their dependence on male relatives and local authorities. The authority vested in male chiefs illustrated the multi-layered oppression of Black women, who were denied agency and opportunities for economic independence within the society.

Amongst the cultural practices restricting women's access to land, the male primogeniture rule has been especially influential in traditional settings. This practice dictates that the oldest surviving male, whether from a monogamous or polygynous family, inherits the deceased's estate, systematically excluding women and children born from female lineage (Chuma, 2005; Himonga, 2004). African men adopted the practice for its material benefits rather than its authenticity as a pre-colonial tradition. Thus, the persistence of this practice often reflects power dynamics disguised as social norms, with women accepting such discrimination as an unchallenged part of tradition.

Maluleke (2012) argues that male primogeniture was not a pre-colonial customary law but a construct introduced during colonial times, particularly through the Natal Code of Zulu Law, which placed men in positions of power and established a gender hierarchy. The colonial state further reinforced it to

simplify property transfer, negotiating primarily with a single male family representative rather than engaging multiple family members. However, other scholars, including van Niekerk (2005, cited in Maunatlala & Maimela, 2020) and Himonga (2004), argue that the rule was initially intended to safeguard the family legacy and ensure the continuity of lineage rather than to discriminate against women.

The male primogeniture rule persisted through apartheid and colonial-era legal frameworks, further entrenching women's marginalisation in matters of inheritance and land rights. During apartheid in South Africa, male chiefs or local authorities administered the property of deceased men, leaving women with little say in its distribution. The 1927 South African Union Act stipulated that movable property of a deceased man was to be "administered under native law and custom" (Black Administration Act 38 of 1927), often excluding women and reinforcing their dependence on male relatives.

The post-apartheid legal reforms, particularly the 2004 Constitutional Court ruling in *Bhe and Others vs The Magistrate*, marked a significant shift in this system. The court declared the male primogeniture rule unconstitutional, affirming women's right to inherit property and challenging long-standing injustices embedded in customary law (Himonga, 2004). This ruling illustrated how legal reforms could confront entrenched gender norms and offered hope for transforming cultural and legal practices to ensure equal rights for women. Nevertheless, the persistence of cultural practices such as male primogeniture highlights that legal change alone is insufficient; meaningful gender equality in land access requires legal reform and the transformation of societal attitudes.

The ongoing influence of male primogeniture serves as a reminder of how deeply embedded cultural practices can shape societal behaviours and socio-economic positioning, even after legal abolition. Critically examining this practice is essential to understanding the broader struggle for women's land rights and the continued effort to challenge patriarchal norms in African societies.

## **Women as Custodians of Traditions Vis-à-Vis their Subjectification**

Women are often seen as the guardians and transmitters of cultural traditions; however, these same traditions frequently serve to subjectify them. The term “subjectification” refers to the process by which individuals are identified with or interpreted through their subjective experiences (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2025). In the context of gender dynamics, subjectification occurs when men, based on their own societal experiences, assert power over women, viewing themselves as superior and relegating women to inferior positions. This results in the control of women by a patriarchal system that reinforces male dominance. As Wadesango et al. (2011) argue, harmful traditional practices are deeply rooted in discriminatory perceptions of women’s roles in society. These practices not only undermine women’s status but also perpetuate prejudice against them, framing their subordinate position as legitimate and natural.

In many communities, this subjugation is reinforced through cultural norms that deny women the agency to make autonomous decisions regarding their sexuality, marriage, childbearing, and even the religion, nationality, and citizenship of their children (Msuya, 2019). Msuya (2019) further contends that these practices create a stark dichotomy where women must navigate a complex choice between their cultural obligations and their inherent rights, an issue largely absent for men. This ongoing tension plays a crucial role in shaping women’s self-identity within their cultural contexts, where they are often made to conform to power structures that limit their autonomy.

Hingston and Asuelime (2019) similarly assert that these harmful cultural practices actively promote patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. The continued emphasis on male dominance and the exclusion of women from key decision-making processes not only diminishes their power but also entrenches their marginalised societal position. Ultimately, this subjugation is not merely a product of tradition but rather

a systematic and entrenched process that influences women's self-perception and their standing within their communities.

### **The Infiltration of Colonial Forces and Role of Patriarchy in African Women's Loss of Land Rights**

Patriarchy and male primogeniture have long impeded the development of women, especially in African societies. These systems limit women's access to economic resources, power, and position. The infusion of patriarchal beliefs from colonial influences has further marginalised African women, restricting their opportunities and societal roles. Women in many African societies have traditionally been seen as the "other," particularly when inheritance practices favour men, excluding women from owning land or property. As these colonial beliefs were passed down, African cultural practices were altered, often to the detriment of women. Despite these challenges, efforts to reform societal structures and reintegrate women into the economy are ongoing. However, modern African women struggle to find their identities within these transformed communities.

Bertolt (2018) asserts that the oppression of women can be traced back to the European imperial project, which was heavily shaped by a patriarchal worldview. Locher-Scholten (2000) reveals that European women, particularly in the Dutch colonial context, were expected to adhere to domestic roles, limiting their professional and economic agency. These gendered norms, enforced through colonialism, displaced African women from their productive roles, particularly in the agricultural sector. Hill (2022) highlights that those colonial powers reduced African women to dependent status, stripping them of their rights to own property, earn wages, and fully participate in the economy. The colonisers' belief in the inferiority of African women led to policies that sought to diminish their power and influence in the household and broader society (Msuya, 2019).

The loss of land and autonomy had severe economic consequences for African women, forcing them into dependency on men and the informal economy (Wachira, 2010). This shift not only eroded their economic power but also reinforced gender

inequalities. The idea that women were inherently inferior to men was normalised through colonialism, a belief that did not arise from African traditions but was an invention of the colonial system. Saungweme (2021) argues that while patriarchy existed in Africa before colonialism, it was not as pervasive or entrenched as it became under colonial rule. Women enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy, and their societal roles were not as rigidly defined as they would become under European influence (Saungweme, 2021).

Colonialism imposed a particularly harmful form of patriarchy, reshaping gender roles and marginalising women to a degree that was previously unknown. Lugones (2016) notes that colonialism co-opted men into patriarchal roles that were carefully constructed by colonisers, replacing indigenous forms of governance, which in many cases were matriarchal or more gender equal. According to Saungweme (2021), this shift resulted in a profound loss of women's political and economic autonomy, particularly through the dispossession of land, which had once provided women with independence and a means to secure livelihoods. The erosion of matriarchal and gender-equitable practices paved the way for male dominance and neglect of women's pre-colonial political activity (Bertolt, 2018).

Colonialism introduced new values such as individualism, capitalism, and the erosion of collective African traditions, which had previously fostered community solidarity and gender equity (Locher-Scholten, 2011). As Maluleke (2012) suggests, South Africans need to critically examine their cultural practices in light of the historical legacies of colonialism and apartheid. Such critical analysis is essential to distinguishing between traditions that continue to serve the community's development and those that perpetuate harm, especially regarding women's rights (Ntuli, 2019). Msuya (2019) argues that meaningful change must come from within the community, involving traditional justice institutions and policymakers in a dialogue about harmful practices and their impacts on women.

The role of traditional and religious leaders in rural communities is central to transforming harmful cultural

practices (Mantshi et al., 2010). These leaders hold significant influence over the customs and values of their communities and can serve as advocates for change, particularly in addressing violence against women. Empowering such leaders to challenge patriarchal norms can lead to a shift in community attitudes towards women and gender-based violence.

South Africa's African customary law, rooted in the values of different ethnic groups, has been heavily influenced by patriarchy, which often leaves women vulnerable to abuse with little recourse (Mubangizi & Tlale, 2023). Like all legal systems, customary law must adapt to contemporary socio-economic realities, including gender equality (Bourque & Warren, in Msuya, 2019). International advocacy has been crucial in bringing attention to women's rights, leading to legal protections for women and children in many African countries. However, integrating international human rights standards with traditional cultural values remains a complex issue. Maluleke (2012) emphasises the importance of distinguishing between past practices that served a functional purpose and those that are no longer relevant because of changes in the global socio-economic landscape.

Although cultural traditions may seem static, they are, in fact, subject to change. The resistance to altering harmful practices reflects a fear of Western cultural imperialism, a sentiment expressed by Msuya (2020), who notes that some communities perceive any shift in their cultural practices as an imposition of foreign ideologies. This resistance often contributes to the persistence of harmful gender norms and practices, particularly in the context of land tenure, where men have assumed custodianship of land, excluding women from farming contracts and economic participation (Ainslie & Kepe, 2016; Akinola, 2018). While international institutions continue to pressure African governments to meet human rights standards, the balance between global advocacy and the protection of cultural traditions remains a contentious issue.

Thus, the intersection of colonialism, patriarchy, and African traditions has created a complex landscape for gender



equality in Africa. The legacy of colonial rule continues to shape gender relations, particularly through the control of land and economic resources. However, the ongoing struggle for women's rights and empowerment highlights the possibility of change, with local leaders, policymakers, and international advocacy playing critical roles in reshaping cultural practices to promote gender equity and justice.

### **The Persistence and Entrenchment of Patriarchy in Traditional African Societies**

Broadly speaking, women experience exclusion, particularly within the confines of tradition, where their marginalisation is entrenched and justified. This creates an imbalance of power between men and women, with tradition often serving as a tool of discrimination. The failure of the law to adequately address these disparities highlights the complexities surrounding gender inequality. Traditional practices, which are commonly perceived as fixed and immutable, are frequently employed to perpetuate the discrimination of women. These entrenched social constructs are often seen as natural, though this perception is misguided. It seems that these inventions or external influences have been manipulated over time, shaping the modern societal structures that we struggle to reform today.

While modernisation has led to many women's liberation, it has not yet fully achieved this for all. This notion, evident in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and still relevant today, especially in some African societies, illustrates the persistence of harmful traditional practices (HTPs) that limit women's ability to enjoy their rights fully (Glover, et. al. 2018). Deep-seated socio-cultural beliefs often bolster the continued prevalence of these practices. For instance, consent may be viewed as a sign of respect for tradition or religion, and HTPs may be perceived as an integral part of cultural life. Communities often coerce individuals into accepting or tolerating these practices, fearing sanctions or communal humiliation. In some cases, women may also see these practices as a form of protection for their family's dignity or a means to alleviate poverty through financial support

(Hingston & Asuelime, 2019). This creates a significant challenge in reconciling customary practices with civil law, particularly in countries like South Africa, where the Constitution guarantees the right to live free from harm while acknowledging the right to practice one's culture. However, the persistence of traditional practices continues to impede legal reforms, suggesting that the legal system must find ways to balance these competing rights better (Hingston & Asuelime, 2019).

Many African states have sought to implement legal reforms to promote women's inclusion in response to past injustices. These reforms often involve redrafting or introducing new laws and policies. However, it can be argued that the implementation of these reforms has been inconsistent, and many women across the continent continue to suffer from oppression and gender-based violence (Glover et al., 2018). In South Africa, the drive for legal reform was initially fuelled by the nationalist anti-colonial struggle, which sought to include gender issues as part of the broader transformative project (Clarno & Vally, 2023). The inclusion of gender in the liberation struggle was partly the result of women's insistence on integrating gender concerns into the national agenda, ensuring that gender equality became a cornerstone of the post-apartheid legal framework (Magubane, 2013). Without women's active role in this process, gender issues might not have been incorporated into the reform agenda.

Despite the inclusion of gender equality in South Africa's post-apartheid legal framework, significant gaps remain. Existing laws, while progressive, are insufficient to address the complexities of gender-based discrimination fully, and they must be bolstered by more comprehensive legal measures to effectively criminalise practices that contravene individuals' constitutional rights (Jokani et al., 2018). There is a clear need for a legal framework that protects women from harmful traditional practices and provides robust enforcement mechanisms. Gender equality, a fundamental aspect of liberation, requires continued legal and societal efforts to challenge and eradicate entrenched discriminatory practices. Thus, while progress has been made, further action is needed

to ensure that women's rights are fully realised and protected under the law.

### **South African Policy Efforts**

South Africa recognises multiple forms of customary law, which influence land rights in distinct ways. Codified customary law refers to rules formally recorded, often during colonial or apartheid-era legal frameworks, and applied rigidly by authorities. Living customary law, in contrast, consists of practices that evolve over time, shaped by community members in their daily lives and adaptable to contemporary values and constitutional principles. More broadly, traditional/customary law encompasses the inherited norms and practices within communities, whether codified or dynamic. Distinguishing these terms is important for understanding how legal reforms interact with rigid and evolving customary practices, particularly in addressing women's land rights. Within this framework, South Africa has implemented various land reform and restitution policies aimed at redressing historical injustices. These policies attempt to reconcile statutory law with customary practices while promoting gender equality.

#### **Land Reform and Restitution**

The Provision of Certain Land for Settlement Act (No. 126 of 1993) regulates the allocation and settlement of land, providing mechanisms for planning, development, and financial support for land reform purposes (South African Government, no date). Similarly, the Restitution of Land Rights Act (No. 22 of 1994) established a Commission on Restitution of Land Rights and a Land Claims Court to restore rights to individuals and communities dispossessed of land after 19 June 1913 because of racially discriminatory laws (South African Government, no date). The Provision of Certain Land for Settlement Act, No. 126 of 1993 (RSA, 1993), states that.

This Act makes provisions for the designation of certain land, the regulation of the subdivision of such land, and the settlement of persons thereon. In addition, it provides

for the acquisition, maintenance, planning, development, improvement and disposal of property and the provision of financial assistance for land reform purposes (South African Government, no date).

The Restitution of Land Rights Act, No. 22 of 1994 (RSA, 1994), states that.

The Act makes provision for the restitution of rights in land to persons or communities dispossessed of such rights after 19 June 1913 due to past racially discriminatory laws or practices. The Act established a Commission on Restitution of Land Rights and a Land Claims Court to administer this task. The Minister is authorised to purchase, acquire, or expropriate land or rights in land for restitution awards (South African Government, no date).

Despite these legal frameworks, the land reform process has been slow, hampered by political corruption, patronage, and bureaucratic delays. Many beneficiaries remain disadvantaged, and the 30% land redistribution target set in 1994 has now been moved to 2030 (NPC, 2011; Kirsten & Sihlobo, 2025). In rural areas, traditional authorities often favour men in land allocation, further limiting women's access to land and reinforcing patriarchal control. To stimulate the process, the South African government seeks to create the Land Reform and Agricultural Development Agency alongside agricultural programmes that aim to assist emerging Black farmers. Another limitation in the land reform process in rural areas is that traditional authorities tend to favour men over women, thus centralising land allocation.

### **Traditional Courts Bill**

Scholars such as Wall (2015), Claassens (2014), and Mnisi-Weeks (2012) have highlighted the inconsistencies between customs and civil law in South Africa. The Traditional Courts Bill (TCB) (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2008) previously failed to recognise the existing prejudice against women in traditional courts. The Bill has been presented

to Parliament multiple times, most recently on 8 September 2022. The current version of the Traditional Courts Bill does not reflect the vision that rural communities had suggested before the amendments (Tait & Taylor, 2023).

A primary concern is that citizens' democratic rights may be compromised if the Bill does not include an explicit opt-out clause, effectively forcing individuals "into the jurisdiction of a traditional leader and court without any choice" (Harrison, 2022). In addition, some rural communities are geographically restricted to dealing with leaders they may not recognise, as these leaders were imposed during apartheid (Harrison, 2022). Harrison further notes that the Bill undermines the nature of living customary law and the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

Nyembezi (2022) warns that the Bill has the potential to perpetuate abuse and discrimination against rural citizens. He argues that rural democracy and rights should not be treated as a nuisance by the parliamentary executive or legislature but rather as areas requiring practical reform. Harrison concurs, noting the Bill's current impracticality because of limited accessibility to justice for rural populations (Harrison, 2022). The Stop the Bantustans Campaign, initiated by the Alliance for Rural Democracy (LRS, 2018), advocates for voluntary affiliation, constitutional rights, and living customary law to form the foundation of the Bill. They emphasise that the Bill must be drafted in consultation with rural communities to preserve the integrity and dignity of traditional courts (Tait & Taylor, 2023).

Despite the Bill's reform intentions, Kunene (2022) observes that it cannot achieve its objectives yet. Former KwaZulu-Natal Premier Nomusa Dube-Ncube stated that during a Provincial Executive Council meeting, strong concerns were expressed regarding the perception that the Bill infringes upon women's rights and freedom of choice (Kunene, 2022).

South Africa appears committed to protecting women, despite implementation challenges. Historically, customary law was subordinate to the Constitution, but this has changed, and it is now binding on the state and courts (Doubell, 2020). As

a signatory to the Maputo Protocol and CEDAW, the country also faces international obligations to ensure that women are effectively consulted and involved in policy decisions affecting them (Doubell, 2020). Practical measures to support women include financial literacy initiatives, access to machinery funding, and improved capital availability for women farmers, helping them strengthen their small agri-businesses and gain greater economic independence.

## **Living Customary Law**

### **Definition and Evolution**

Living customary law refers to customary practices that have evolved and are continually shaped in accordance with the South African Constitution of 1996. Unlike codified customary law, which predates 1996 and is formally recorded, living law reflects the dynamic and adaptive nature of custom as applied in daily life. The Constitutional Court has emphasised that living customary law must allow flexibility and change, expanding the definition of custom beyond chiefs and officials to include all who engage with and shape it in practice (Claassens, 2013).

Since 2003, Parliament has introduced legislation, including the amended Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act (TLGFA) of 2011 and the Traditional Courts Bill (TCB) of 2017, that arguably consolidate power in traditional authorities. These laws have enabled traditional leaders to unilaterally define living customary law, thereby influencing land allocation and customary practices, and altering the balance of power in rural areas (Claassens, 2013).

### **Power Dynamics and Gender Inequality**

Discrimination has been a persistent feature of customary law in South Africa, from its historical foundations to contemporary practice. Women are often overlooked as equals and are subjected to biased rulings in customary courts. The TCB and related legislation, despite constitutional safeguards, have reinforced patriarchal structures by failing to explicitly protect

women's rights to representation and participation (Mnisi-Weeks, 2012; Claassens, 2013).

Women acquire land under customary law primarily through marriage, inheritance, or land tenure (Berniger, 2010). While statutory law supports women's rights to buy, sell, inherit, and manage land, communal law remains controlled by patriarchal tribal committees, with some lands vested in the chief's trust (Pienaar, 2009). Consequently, laws such as the TLGFA and earlier versions of the TCB often perpetuate gendered power imbalances. Section 7 of the TCB, for example, allows representation by a person of choice but does not explicitly ensure that women can represent themselves, effectively continuing practices that limit women's agency (Mnisi-Weeks, 2012).

Top-down drafting of legislation has further exacerbated these inequalities. The 2017 TCB, while improving gender equality on paper, still failed to consult rural women during its formulation, leaving traditional leaders with disproportionate control over marginalised communities (Mnisi & Claassens, 2009; Louw, 2020).

### **International Obligations and Policy Gaps**

South Africa is bound by international agreements, including the Maputo Protocol and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), which obligate the state to ensure rural women can access land, resources, and development opportunities. Article 14 of CEDAW specifically recognises rural women as a marginalised group requiring urgent attention in areas such as healthcare, education, financial services, technology, and livelihoods.

Despite these commitments, the practical implementation of policy often falls short. Laws intended to modernise customary practices and promote equality may inadvertently reinforce the power of traditional authorities while sidelining women. Claassens and Mnisi-Weeks (2009) caution that policies attempting to bypass customary structures may discourage

women who rely on customary entitlements as their primary means of asserting land rights. Scholars like Himonga (2005) and Sithole (2010) emphasise that analysing hierarchies within gendered communities is crucial to understanding women's subordination under living customary law.

### Transitional Note to Traditional Courts Bill

The tensions between statutory policy, constitutional mandates, and living customary law are evident in the ongoing debates surrounding the Traditional Courts Bill. While the Bill aims to reform customary justice, it continues to raise concerns about women's rights, rural representation, and the consolidation of power amongst traditional authorities. Understanding these dynamics is essential for evaluating the Bill's potential impact on rural women and their access to land.

#### Policy, Customary Law, and the Traditional Courts Bill

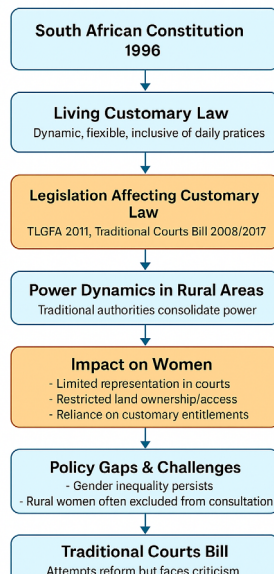


**Figure 2:** Policy, Customary Law, and the Traditional Courts Bill. Source: Authors, 2025



## **Women's Responses to Harmful Traditions**

Women have long resisted their subjugation within patriarchal systems, advocating for gender equality and equal access to land and resources. Despite the entrenched nature of harmful traditions, women continue to fight for their rights in various forms. One of the key challenges that women face within many African societies is the male-dominated traditional authority, which is heavily influenced by patriarchal ideologies that limit women's ability to access land. African cultures have historically acknowledged men's property rights, often neglecting women's capacity to own, inherit, claim, or commercialise land (Federici, 2011).

Moreover, the post-independence efforts by democratic governments to reform laws to include women in the land distribution process have had limited success. The delegation of land distribution powers to chiefs or kings has perpetuated the notion that men are the primary custodians of land. Thus, despite legal reforms aimed at creating gender equality, the reality remains that traditional authority structures continue to be male-dominated, ensuring that women's access to land remains restricted. In societies where tradition negatively impacts women's ability to flourish, women often find creative ways to negotiate access to land. Some engage in non-traditional practices, such as same-sex marriages or mother-and-son partnerships, to navigate customary land laws. Others may work through trusted male relatives or formal cooperatives to gain access to land ownership (Makhetha & Hart, 2018). Federici (2011) highlights that those women who can afford to buy land often use informal savings to secure land ownership, protecting their assets in the event of their husbands' deaths, which highlights the need for financial independence and security.

While these strategies have enabled some women to acquire land, their resistance to traditional practices often threatens the cultural values that sustain their communities. This perception can discourage women from challenging patriarchal norms, and as a result, their efforts to achieve

gender equality are frequently met with opposition. Jokani et al. (2018) argue that reframing the intent of traditional practices is not impossible. Cultural practices can be restructured to respect human rights and promote gender equality. The backlash from men against gender equality can be understood as an “aggrieved entitlement,” where men perceive their dominance being undermined by the push for equal rights (Jokani et al., 2018).

The resistance to change is not without consequences, as it negatively affects men and women. In this context, the principle of gender equality was introduced during the anti-colonial struggle and became a central aspect of liberation. Women’s activism played a crucial role in drafting the 1994 South African Constitution, which is regarded as one of the most progressive legal frameworks globally. This Constitution enshrines gender equality as a fundamental right, making strides towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

Despite legislative gains, rural women continue to experience substantial challenges. Although women’s activism has driven progressive legal reforms at the national level, these changes have brought slight tangible improvement to the everyday lives of rural women. The legislation intended to protect women’s rights has not consistently been effectively implemented in their daily lives, and rural women, in particular, struggle to access these legal protections. The transition to democracy in South Africa in 1994, while creating new opportunities for women, also resulted in new power dynamics in rural areas, which, in some instances, have empowered women to claim land. Nevertheless, women’s struggle for land rights remains fraught with challenges.

Women’s agency and activism have been central to the push for gender equality in South Africa and across Africa. While progress has been made, particularly regarding legal reforms and the inclusion of women in traditional councils, women continue to face significant barriers. Despite the reform of customary laws and the formalisation of women’s participation in traditional councils, sexual violence, inequality, and discrimination persist, especially in rural areas (Jokani et al.,

2018). Women's activism, while essential, is still undermined by entrenched patriarchal practices that continue to limit their rights and access to resources. Consequently, while women's agency is widely recognised, significant challenges remain in achieving true gender equality in land ownership and other areas of life.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, African women's struggle for land rights in traditional societies is a complex intersection of cultural norms, legal frameworks, and historical influences. Traditional practices, particularly male primogeniture, have long reinforced gender inequalities by restricting women's access to land, ownership rights, and the ability to transfer land. These entrenched practices not only marginalise women but also limit their economic and social mobility, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and disempowerment. Furthermore, colonial legacies have compounded these disparities, exacerbating women's marginalisation and making it more difficult to challenge these patriarchal norms.

Although some legislative reforms, such as South Africa's Traditional Courts Bill, have been introduced to address these inequities, the deep-rooted nature of patriarchal structures means that such legal efforts have had limited success in effecting meaningful change. Rural women, in particular, continue to face barriers that prevent them from fully accessing and benefiting from these reforms. These challenges demonstrate that while legal frameworks are essential in promoting gender equity, they must be accompanied by cultural shifts that challenge and transform traditional practices.

In the end, the struggle for women's land rights in Africa is not only about securing legal recognition but also about dismantling the power imbalances that have been institutionalised through centuries of patriarchal traditions and colonialism. Thus, African women's struggle for land rights requires not only the reform of discriminatory laws but also a reconfiguration of cultural norms. True transformation

will depend on centring women's voices in policy and custom, ensuring that traditions evolve to reflect gender justice rather than perpetuate subjugation.

## References

- Ainslie, A. & Kepe, T. (2016). Understanding the resurgence of traditional authorities in post-apartheid South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42(1), 19–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2016.1121714>
- Akinola, A. (2018). Women, culture and Africa's land reform agenda. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02234>
- Bertolt, B. (2018). Thinking otherwise: Theorising the colonial/modern gender system in Africa. *African Sociological Review/Revue Africaine de Sociologie*, 22(1), 2–17.
- Bevir, M. (2000). On tradition. *Humanitas*, 13(2), 28–53. <https://doi.org/10.5840/humanitas20001329>
- Bhe and Others v Khayelitsha Magistrate and Others (CCT 49/03) [2004] ZACC 17; 2005 (1) SA 580 (CC); 2005 (1) BCLR 1 (CC) (15 October 2004).
- Black Administration Act 38 of 1927. South African Government. Available at: [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201505/act38of1927.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201505/act38of1927.pdf)
- Bourque, S. C. & Warren, K. B. (1981). *Women of the Andes: Patriarchy and social change in two Peruvian towns*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.23894>
- Bunelli, A., Moyo, M. & Nkomo, M. (2015). Women's rights to land in sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges and opportunities. *African Journal of Law*, 15(2), 130–145.
- Chapot, M. (2022). *What balance between cultures and the promotion of human rights?* Grow Think Tank. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.growthinktank.org/en/what-balance-between-cultures-and-the-promotion-of-human-rights/>.

- Chipenda, C. & Tom, T. (2022). The youth and land access challenges: Critical reflections from post-fast track land reform Zimbabwe. In: Greiner, C., Van Wolputte, S. & Bollig, M. (eds.) *African futures*, pp: 185–196. Leiden: Brill. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004471641\\_016](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004471641_016)
- Chuma, M. (2005). Male primogeniture and its impact on women's inheritance rights in South Africa. *South African Law Journal*, 122(4), 389–406.
- Claassens, A. (2013). Recent changes in women's land rights and contested customary law in South Africa. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 13(1), 71–92. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12007>
- Claassens, A. (2014). Denying ownership and equal citizenship: Continuities in the state's use of law and 'custom' 1913–2013. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40(4), 761–779. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2014.931061>
- Claassens, A. & Mnisi-Weeks, S. (2009). Rural women redefining land rights in the context of living customary law. *South African Journal on Human Rights*, 25(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/19962126.2009.11865214>
- Clarno, A. & Vally, S. (2023). The context of struggle: Racial capitalism and political praxis in South Africa. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 46(16), 3425–3447. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2022.2143239>
- Department of Justice and Constitutional Development. (2008). Traditional Courts Bill. *Government Gazette No. 30902*. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/b15-08.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/b15-08.pdf)
- De Souza, L. M. (2020). Evolution of provisions relating to violence against women in South Africa's Traditional Courts Bill. *Acta Juridica*, 1(2020).
- Doubell, L. M. (2020). *The allocation of resources for realising women's rights: An analysis of Article 26(2) of the Maputo Protocol*. Doctoral thesis, Stellenbosch University.
- Durojaye, E. & Adebajo, A. (2014). Harmful cultural practices and gender equality in Nigeria. *Gender & Behaviour*, 12(1), 6169–6181.

- Federici, S. (2011). Women, land struggles, and the reconstruction of the commons. *Working USA*, 14(1), 41–56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-4580.2010.00319.x>
- Glover, J., Liebling, H., Goodman, S. & Barrett, H. (2018). Persistence and resistance of harmful traditional practices (HTPs) perpetuated against girls in Africa and Asia. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 19(2), 44–64.
- Harrison, D. (2022). *Regulating Vernacular Dispute Resolution Forums: Controversy concerning the process, substance, and implications of South Africa's Traditional Courts Bill*. *Mail and Guardian*, 13 September 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://mg.co.za/opinion/2022-09-13-parliament-passes-problematic-traditional-courts-bill/> [Accessed 14 November 2022].
- Hill, R. (2022). *Decolonising Women*. OER Project. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.oerproject.com/OER-Materials/OER-Media/HTML-Articles/Origins/Unit8/Decolonizing-Women>.
- Himonga, C. (2004). The unconstitutionality of male primogeniture in South African law. *South African Law Review*, 121(1), 15–30.
- Himonga, C. (2005). The advancement of African women's rights in the first decade of democracy in South Africa: The reform of the customary law of marriage and succession. *Acta Juridica*, 82, 107–2005.
- Hingston, C. A. & Asuelime, T. L. (2019). Violated by heritage: African women and harmful traditional practices. *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development*, 8(Special Issue 1), 51–64. <https://doi.org/10.31920/2050-4284/2019/S1n1a3>
- Human Rights Watch. (2017). *'You Will Get Nothing': Violations of property and inheritance rights of widows in Zimbabwe*. Human Rights Watch, 24 January 2017. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/01/24/you-will-get-nothing/violations-property-and-inheritance-rights-widows-zimbabwe> [Accessed 20 September 2020].
- Iryana, W. (2023). *Indonesian Islamic tradition is a wisdom that liberates society from the shackles of globalisation*. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Multidisciplinary Science, KnE Life Sciences*, pp: 407–422. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v8i16.14057>

## Chapter Nine

- Jokani, M., Knoetze, E. & Erasmus, D. (2018). A criminal law response to the harmful practices of ukuthwala. *Obiter*, 39(3), 747-767. <https://doi.org/10.17159/obiter.v39i3.11332>
- Kirsten, J. & Sihlobo, W. (2025). *The uncomfortable truth about South Africa's agriculture*. Tracey McDonald Publishers.
- Kunene, M. (2022). Traditional Courts Bill won't pass muster. *Zulu Land Observer*, <https://zululandobserver.co.za/275903/traditional-courts-bill-wont-pass-muster/>
- Legal Resources Centre (LRC). (2018). *Stop The Bantustans Campaign*. LRC. [Online]. Available at: <https://lrc.org.za/wp-content/uploads/LRC-TKLA-englishWEB.pdf>
- Locher-Scholten, E. (2000). *Women and the colonial state: essays on gender and modernity in the Netherlands Indies 1900-1942*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press. <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789053564035>
- Louw, M. D. (2020). Evolution of provisions relating to violence against women in South Africa's Traditional Courts Bill. *Acta Juridica*, 1(2020).
- Lugones, M. (2016). The Coloniality of Gender. In: Harcourt, W. (eds) *The Palgrave handbook of gender and development*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-38273-3\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-38273-3_2)
- Magubane, Z. (2013). Women and the struggle for gender inclusivity during the transition, 1990-1994. In: *The road to democracy in South Africa, Volume 6, 1990-1996*. South African Democracy Education Trust.
- Makhetha, E. & Hart, T. (2018) Hunger for farmland among female farmers in Limpopo province: bodies, violence and land. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 32(4), 65-77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2018.1535042>
- Maluleke, M. J. (2012). Culture, Tradition, Custom, Law and Gender Equality. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 1(2012). <https://doi.org/10.4314/pelj.v15i1.1>
- Mantshi, T., Mullick, S. & Dlamini, P. C. (2010). *The role of traditional leaders in preventing and addressing sexual and gender-based violence: Findings from KwaZulu-Natal, Northwest and Limpopo provinces in South Africa*. Final report, Johannesburg: Population Council.

- Maunatlala, K. & Maimela, C. (2020). The implementation of customary law of succession and common law of succession, respectively: With a specific focus on the eradication of the rule of male primogeniture. *De Jure Law Journal*, 53(1), 36–53. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2225-7160/2020/v53a3>
- Msuya N. H. (2019). Challenges Surrounding the Adjudication of Women's Rights in Relation to Customary Law and Practices in Tanzania. *PER / PELJ*, 22(2019). <https://doi.org/10.17159/1727-3781/2019/v22i0a5012>
- Msuya, N. H. (2020). Advocating Positive Traditional Culture to Eradicate Harmful Aspects of Traditional Culture for Gender Equality in Africa. *Obiter*, 41, 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.17159/obiter.v41i1.10547>
- Mubangizi, J. C. & Tlale, M. T. (2023). How gender-based cultural practices violate women's property rights and inhibit property ownership: A South African perspective. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102678>
- National Planning Commission (NPC). (2011). *National Development Plan 2030: Our Future – Make it Work*. Pretoria: National Planning Commission. Found at: [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/ndp-2030-our-future-make-it-workr.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/ndp-2030-our-future-make-it-workr.pdf)
- Ntuli, H. S. (2019). Conflict between Traditional Cultural Practices for Women and South African Government Laws. *Gender & Behaviour*.
- Nyembezi, N. (2022). *Traditional Courts Bill mocks rights of rural citizens*. IOL, <https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/opinion/traditional-courts-bill-mocks-rights-of-rural-citizens-ccad62c2-e596-47da-9506-ab6e133de2ac>
- Republic of South Africa (RSA). (1993). Provision of Certain Land for Settlement Act, No. 126 of 1993. *Government Gazette No. 14992*. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/act126of1993.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/act126of1993.pdf)



- Republic of South Africa (RSA). (1994). Restitution of Land Rights Act, No. 22 of 1994. *Government Gazette No. 16106*. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/act22of1994.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/act22of1994.pdf)
- Republic of South Africa (RSA). (2003). Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Amendment Act, No. 41 of 2003. *Government Gazette No. 25855*. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/a41-03.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a41-03.pdf)
- Saungweme, F. J. S. (2021). *A Critique of Africa's Post-Colonial Freedoms Through a Feminist Lens: Challenging Patriarchy and Assessing the Gains*. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, Cape Town.
- Sithole, M. P. (2010). Modernity and traditionality in African Governance. *African Insight*, 39(4). <https://doi.org/10.4314/ai.v39i4.54661>
- Merriam-Webster.com. (2025) *Subjectification*. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, [Online]. Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/subjectification> [Accessed: 9 Sep 2025].
- Tait, K. & Taylor, W. K. (2023). The Possibility of Rights Claims-Making in Court: Looking Back on Twenty-Five Years of Social Rights Constitutionalism in South Africa. *Law & Social Inquiry*, 48(3), 1023-1052. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lsi.2022.63>
- Tri, N. (2024). *Culture as a dynamic product of socially and historically situated discourse communities: A review of literature*. Ministry of Science and Technology, Vietnam. 66. 121-128. [https://doi.org/10.31276/VMOSTJOSSH.66\(1\).121-128](https://doi.org/10.31276/VMOSTJOSSH.66(1).121-128)
- United Nations (UN). (1979). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. UN, New York, 18 December 1979. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>.
- Wachira, G. M. (2010). Indigenous peoples' rights to land and natural resources. In: Dersso, S. (ed.) *Perspectives on the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples in Africa*. Pretoria: Pretoria University Law Press, pp: 297-347.

- Wadesango, N., Rembe, S. & Chabaya, O. (2011). Violation of Women's Rights by Harmful Traditional Practices. *Anthropologist*, 13(2): 121-129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09720073.2011.11891187>
- Wall, D. (2015). *Customary Law in South Africa: Historical Development as a Legal System and its Relation to Women's Rights*. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/south-african-history-online-and-southern-methodist-university-partnership-project>
- Wily, L. A. (2011). 'The law is to blame': The vulnerable status of common property rights in sub-Saharan Africa. *Development and Change*, 42(3), 733-757. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2011.01712.x>



# Chapter Ten

## Enhancing Women's Participation in Democratic Governance in Sierra Leone

Maureen Lifongo 

Department of Politics and International Relations

University of Johannesburg 

Johannesburg, South Africa

[mnlifongo@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:mnlifongo@yahoo.co.uk)

### Introduction

Women's participation in democratic governance has become increasingly prominent in African politics for several decades. Since the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, the issue of female political participation has garnered momentum, as many states have taken steps to institute mechanisms to address their under-representation, especially in democratic governance. The implementation of these instruments has led to more significant strides in terms of increasing women's descriptive and substantive political representation in some countries (Bauer, 2012:370), while in others, the gap between women and men in politics has widened. This has highlighted the argument on whether the creation and adoption of these mechanisms are solely for procedural benefits or with an intent to translate to substantive results. However, since liberal democracy stresses equal participation of men and women in the political process to achieve substantive results, safeguarding women's empowerment and gender equality is paramount.

Sierra Leonean women are renowned for their political involvement before and after independence. Regrettably, the varied political history of *countercoups*, coups, and one-party authoritarianism after independence ended their political

activism (Castillejo, 2009:1-32). This was short-lived, as women, and women's groups soon led prominent campaigns and discussions, which culminated in the end of the civil war. Subsequently, the transition to peace in 2002 (Abdullah, 2010:62). Despite the above, women remain under-represented in democratic governance as men mostly dominate the political space. As a result, female representation and access to political leadership positions across local governments, national parliaments, and executive institutions of power remain low (UN Women, 2024). Barriers such as systemic patriarchal practices and cultural norms continue to confine Sierra Leonean women and their activities within their homes, thus affording them little or no room to participate in politics (Kellow, 2010).

Since the essence of liberal democracy requires equal representation, participation and inclusion of all groups in society (Dahl, 2004), women thus have the right to be involved in decision-making processes which affect their lives. Their inclusion and equal representation in political processes remains paramount for the enhancement on the consolidation of democracy (Kim, 2019:594). Also, since the quality of democracy is hinged not only on how accountable political institutions are but also on the extent to which men and women participate in these institutions, gender becomes an important necessary aspect, and women's political exclusion will result in an incomplete and biased form of democracy (Moghadam, 2011).

Accordingly, a UN Women report (2025) UN Women report (2025) indicates that women's equal participation and leadership in political and public life is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Number five of the SDGs requires all states to implement policies to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. Indicator 5.5 specifically calls on states to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all political, economic, and public decision-making levels. However, after almost three decades of resisting calls from women's groups and promoters of gender equality for the adoption of female quotas to increase women's political representation in democratic governance, Sierra Leonean

president Julius Bio, on 19 January 2022 (a few months before the country's general elections) signed into law the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act (Thomas, 2023).

The 2022 GEWE Act highlights the importance of gender mainstreaming and women's participation in decision-making roles across all areas of governance. It has been regarded as an important step by the government to promote the representation of women in democratic governance. This is because it is widely believed that effecting a 30% constitutionally mandated gender quota system is one of the most effective ways to achieve more female representation in legislatures and close the wide gap that exists numerically between men and women in the public sphere. Also, the implementation of the quota system has resulted in an increase in female representation in politics in many countries, which is crucial for achieving broader gender equality (Nayar, 2021).

In addition, the concept of democratic governance refers to institution reform. By institutions, Guell (2002) refers to the ground rules that govern the relationship between men and women since they outline the restrictions and opportunities that both groups encounter through their relationships with others in different contexts. He adds that these institutions could be either formal (organisations and laws) or informal (customs), affecting people's interactions. Measures should be taken to address inequality between men and women. In this regard, the chapter investigates the state of women's participation in democratic governance in Sierra Leone. It further investigates whether the 2022 GEWE Act has implications for the growth of women in the field of democratic governance and what it pertains to future elections in the country. The chapter seeks to contribute to further research on addressing women's political participation in democratic governance in Sierra Leone by using the 2022 GEWE Act as a framework of analysis.

The article adopted a qualitative case chapter approach, allowing the researcher to explore in-depth from different angles. This qualitative approach explored how groups or

individuals contribute to a human or social problem (Creswell, 2017). The approach used an explanatory research design, which allowed for an increased understanding of the term 'democratic governance' and how it has been enhanced in Sierra Leone through the analysis of the 2022 GEWE Act to promote women's political participation. Secondary sources were used, with relevant literature sourced from journal articles, textbooks, official gazettes, documents, and news chapters.

The chapter is divided into five sections: following this introduction, the second section presents a conceptual understanding of emerging literature on the term 'democratic governance' by focusing on its steps, structure, and processes. The third section briefly discusses barriers to women's involvement in African politics. The fourth outlines possible implications for the 2022 GEWE Act on democratic governance in the country. Section five wraps up the discussion and revisits the chapter's main objective.

## **Democratic Governance: An Understanding**

Democratic governance is not a new concept, as many scholars have different interpretations of its origin, nature, and importance for women's political participation. For example, democratic governance is believed to have originated from the word 'democracy', as it facilitates civil liberties, governance, institutional accountability and individual freedoms and human rights for all citizens in pluralistic societies (Fukuyama, 2014:92; Dahl, 2004). As a more inclusive and broader concept, democratic governance stresses the need for citizens' involvement in institutions of governance to exercise their legal rights by drafting and implementing policies for their benefit. Gumede (2021) stresses the importance of these decisions following a democratic process with equal participation of men and women.

Grugel and Pipel (2007:3) identify the key pillars of democratic governance. These include the rule of law, constitutionalism, the role of political institutions in engaging citizens, professionalisation of the civil service, promoting

public transparency, accountability, and citizen's participation in governmental affairs, and enhancing the legitimacy of credible elections (Kim et al., 2005:646-654). Thus, its sustenance relies upon the enhancement of the living standards of all citizens in society. In situations where another group has minimal or no voice in drafting government policies (Obianyo, 2012:179), democratic governance will face challenges.

The nature of an electoral system could positively or negatively affect democratic governance. Although electoral systems and elections are essential components for democratic governance, they are not sufficient requirements for democratic governance, as the choice of an electoral system is shaped by political history and context. Nonetheless, electoral system reform is necessary for ensuring legitimacy, accountability and representation (Du Pisani, 2007:8). This presents an essential space for the inclusion of women in politics, as their needs might be considered during selecting the electoral system. Reilly (2015:225-236) contends that compared to the first past the post (FPTP) system for example, the proportional representation (PR) system enhances women's political participation, as it fairly translates votes into seats, promotes minorities' access to representation, improves gender representation and presents a more socially diverse and inclusive list of candidates. The FPTP, however, may exclude minority parties, encourage sectarian parties and possibly exclude women (Du Pisani, 2007:8).

Narayan (2005) links democratic governance to empowerment. She describes empowerment as "the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives". In this regard, the above terms concern citizens' ability to exercise their rights over state power in different dimensions. Since analysts of democratic governance evaluate the continued involvement of men and women in decision-making structures and their access to public institutions through accountability, organisation and inclusion, their empowerment is also essential as it falls within this category (Munck, 2005).

Democratic governance has been linked to institutions and good governance. Isma'ila and Madu (2016) contend that democratic governance encompasses a set of processes whereby institutions such as the executive, national assembly, political parties, judiciary, community and family exist, and all citizens have the right to exercise their constitutional and legal rights to determine policies best suited to address their needs (Malena, 2009). Since gender inequality is embedded in the above institutions (Brody, 2009:10), it is therefore imperative to monitor them so that they can become more responsive to women's socioeconomic and political needs (Mensah-Kutin, 2010). Therefore, a sound democratic governance needs an autonomous and strong legislature which will not only carry out its legal duties but also implement accountability amongst appointed and elected public officials (Zafarullah, 1999:184). For this reason, governance principles of transparency, accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness and leadership must be enhanced (Goetz, 2007). However, democracy and good governance should not be combined, as democracies alone are not enough to guarantee the interests of women. This can only be possible when democratic states govern competently and enforce the rule of law. In other words, laws guaranteeing women's rights must not only exist but be enforced.

Women's civil and political rights are closely linked to democratic governance. Focusing on emerging literature on women's rights, Jamal (2010) states that women's rights are affected by the political culture of a nation, the type of political right that they possess, the effective implementation of the rule of law and opportunities provided for by the political structure of a state. She further argues that democracy is not achieved without including women in politics and amplifying women's voices in legislation, political institutions, and processes. As Madeline Albright (2010) puts it, 'success without democracy is improbable; democracy without women is impossible'. Apart from the fact that democracy opens the civic space for women and creates more opportunities for them to access political power (Högström, 2015), it also offers them a platform to promote their interests through mobilisation, advocacy and



elections (Beer, 2009). The absence of such spaces affects women negatively, as it makes them more vulnerable to pre-existing patriarchal structures (Jamal, 2010). The inclusion of a gender element is paramount for ensuring women's civil and political rights and, thus, the achievement of democratic governance. The section below briefly discusses barriers against women's political participation in Africa.

### **Barriers Against Women's Political Participation in Africa**

Female exclusion from governance structures such as ministerial positions, political parties' structures, judiciary, parliaments, and even within local governance has been prevalent in Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, female parliamentary representation stood at 12% in 2000, 19% in 2010, 25% in 2020 and 27% at the beginning of 2024 (UN Women, 2024). Although the above figures showed a minimal increase in women's political representation, they indicate the slow progress towards achieving the SDGs by 2030 in the region. Even though some African countries have made greater strides in guaranteeing women's political participation in democratic governance with the adoption and implementation of several international, regional and national gender frameworks, others have made minimal or no efforts (despite their adoption of these same frameworks). As a result, women continue to face exclusion because of socio-economic and political challenges, as explained below.

### **Social Factors**

Fundamental to the constraints that women face is an entrenched patriarchal system which operates at all levels of society, conferring prestige and privilege on men at the expense of women. Patriarchal values tend to sustain oppression through legitimisation obtained via religious dogma, traditional values, and even secular value systems, which often legitimise male domination and gender injustice (International IDEA, 2021:21; Badri & Tripp, 2017). These attitudes and behaviours are

transferred from the private realm and have become embedded into socio-economic and political institutions (Goetz, 2007), thus offering women limited influence when they are accepted into such institutions. Foulds (2014) contends that when women assume more public roles, they become visible in influential positions, and this could probably result in their increased participation in the political process. The restraint of women to household jobs gives them little time to be nurtured for public offices, as men are prepared for roles outside the homes (Morojole, 2011). They become cautious when entering politics or public roles which may affect their marriage or home.

Education provides the required knowledge and talent needed to participate in politics and potential candidates require a minimum awareness of the political system, skills in writing and reading and general knowledge of issues of importance to the public (Hillygus, 2005:27). However, the lack of quality education and low literacy levels affect women's active political participation as they become intimidated and less confident when they need to challenge their male counterparts especially during party nomination processes (Ofusori, 2021). In addition, there is an argument that women were brought up to regard politics as 'foreign' and that their lives and activities were designed to direct them away from power activities. This affords them little time as they will need to juggle between their career and family responsibilities, thus offering them limited time to advance their careers (Kabeer, 2015). Rogers (2011:57) adds that Sierra Leonean women are affected by religious practices. She states that while Christianity (Protestant) has encouraged women's political participation, some Islamists still do not allow women to contest for leadership positions. Their excuse is that women's participation will make them arrogant, and they will subsequently disrespect the male folks. She further argues that part of this belief stems from the varying interpretations (or even misinterpretation) of religion (Rogers, 2011:57).

### **Economic factors**

Income inequality based on gender is another factor that promotes female political exclusion. The median monthly

salary in sub-Saharan Africa for men is twice as much as that of women, and a chapter on the worth of female entrepreneurship in Africa indicated that the incomes of female entrepreneurs are, on average, only two-thirds that of male entrepreneurs (Dube, 2023). Finance is important in politics, as it becomes challenging to fund a campaign or conduct any other political affairs without money (Sivi-Njonjo, 2016). Because of the lack of finance, female political party aspirants might find it challenging to compete for political positions as they are likely to lose out to the highest bidders, who are likely to be men (Opuko et al., 2018). Also, as caregivers and contributors to domestic work, women are left with little income to compete for party positions, as they are not usually supported by the state (Bryson, 2003). Although they might receive support from political parties and the public, these typically happen after securing a nomination (Sidhu & Meena, 2007:11).

## **Political Factors**

The ratification, adoption and signing of international and regional frameworks; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BFA) the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) (also known as the Maputo Protocol and appears to be the most progressive African legal instrument providing a comprehensive set of human rights for women), have been regarded as a point of departure for subsequent national frameworks for many African states. However, the inability of many states either to fully enforce them or to draft appropriate policies to address gender concerns has resulted in the exclusion of women in the political processes. Politics influences policymaking process, and the absence of a significant number of women in influential positions would deny them a fair representation (Milligan, 2014).

The transition to democracy presented many countries emerging from conflict in the 1990s an opportunity to rewrite their legal systems and constitutions to include the provisions of normative frameworks stressing gender equality (Berry et

al., 2021). Although many states utilised this space to design constitutional frameworks and to institute electoral systems which have subsequently fostered the adoption of temporary special measures (TSMs) in the form of affirmative action and quotas to promote female political participation, challenges persist. Some electoral laws are gender-insensitive, while electoral systems promote the under-representation of women. For example, in some African countries (Central Africa Republic, Uganda), the FPTP system seldom substantially increases women's representation. The tendency in countries using the FPTP system is for parties to field candidates in constituencies that they think are most likely to win. In this case, female candidates are often disregarded as safe bets (International IDEA, 2021: 53).

The equality of all voices and gender equality is embedded in freedom of expression. However, many studies have highlighted that women's voices have been limited as they make up less than one-quarter of voices and views heard in the media. Although significant improvements in women's media representation exist (Nyamweda, 2023), female politicians continue to receive less media attention than their male counterparts, as they are regarded as 'trespassers' in the traditionally 'masculine' political world (Verge & Pastor, 2018). In most West African countries, for example, male dominance is prevalent in radio as female programming is usually consigned narrowly to interpretation of gender issues such as childcare, domestic responsibilities or marriage. When on air, women are perceived through a traditional model in the context of their relationship with their children or husbands and not as individuals with a wide variety of various needs and interests (Fortune et al., 2011). This 'silent censorship' has further entrenched women's exclusion from politics as their voices are notably missing from electoral news coverage (International IDEA, 2021:112), which is an essential aspect in securing votes.

In many African countries, politics is tainted by intimidation, persecution, torture and violence, and violence against women seeking political office is very common, especially in politically unstable regions (True et al., 2012:2).

While men and women are victims of this, political violence offers specific challenges to women's political participation and engagements (International IDEA, 2021:23). A 2015 Afrobarometer Survey highlights that women feel 'a sense of vulnerability of political intimidation and violence' (International IDEA, 2021:23). The effects of war continue for years after the fighting ends. While entire communities suffer the impact of armed conflict, women and girls are often the first to lose their rights to education, political participation and livelihoods, amongst other rights being bluntly violated (International IDEA, 2021:23; True et al., 2012:2).

It is widely believed that the primary point of women's entry into politics is through political parties (International IDEA, 2021). However, male dominance in party politics has been named one of the critical constraints for women's membership and participation, especially as candidates. While some political parties have TSM for women's representation in parliament and local government, they do not necessarily apply these same quotas to internal party structures (International IDEA, 2021:73). Although candidates can still compete as independents, it is thus demanding to be elected without the patronage of a political party, especially at a national election. Thus, women seeking entry into electoral politics generally join political parties (Ballington, 2011). Although many women actively participate at the grassroots level in mobilising support and campaigning for their parties, few occupy senior decision-making positions within the parties (Ara, 2019:13). When parties fail to comply with national commitments to ensure that women assume leadership posts within the party, this raises questions about their commitment to advancing gender equality more broadly.

Women's presence in democratic institutions of governance allows for the drafting of broader and inclusive strategies as they interact with men within these institutions. Having discussed possible obstacles faced by women in politics, the section below examines efforts by the Sierra Leonean government (through the adoption of the 2022 GEWE Act) to increase women's participation in democratic governance.

## **Promoting Women's Participation in Democratic Governance in Sierra Leone**

The inclusion of women in democratic governance supports the significance of addressing gender inequality in Sierra Leone and enhancing the provision of SDG 5. Women constitute about 52% of the country's population but account for about 20% of elected positions. Their visibility, voice, representation and participation in appointment and elected positions remain low compared to men (International IDEA, 2024). Democratic governance has highlighted the importance of all citizens' (including women) involvement in politics and decision-making structures. Despite adopting several global, regional and domestic (the three Gender Acts) frameworks by the Sierra Leonean government, female representation in democratic governance is still minimal.

The attainment of democratic governance has been linked to including a gender component in good governance, electoral system, empowerment, local and public institutions, and ensuring civil and political rights. Therefore, including a gender dimension to address structural inequalities which limit women's political participation and involvement in decision-making structures is essential. This is the reason why the signing of the 2022 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act by President Julius Maada Bio in January 2023 (a few months before the 2023 general elections) was regarded by many gender equality promoters as a significant step towards increasing female representation in democratic governance as well as achieving SDG 5. The focus of this chapter has therefore been to investigate whether the 2022 Gender Act has implications for women's democratic governance and what it pertains to future elections in the country, as explained below.

### **The 2022 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act**

Increasingly, "gender quotas have arguably been the most drastic and highly contentious reform in the field of gender equality in the last 50 to 60 years" (Zetterberg, 2009:715). As an important instrument to fast-track female political

representation emanating from the growing impatience on the slow pace of change in women's political power (Dahlerup, 2013), they stipulate a specific percentage of women to be included in positions of leadership (Tappe Ortiz & Kobrich, 2022). Therefore, the passing of the 2022 Gender Act can be alluded to as one of the most concrete mechanisms designed by the Sierra Leonean government to advance women's socio-economic and political rights by increasing their representation. Its passing also raises a question on whether its implementation will have more significant implications for addressing gender inequality between men and women and what it pertains to democratic governance and future elections in the country.

Since the equal representation of men and women is one of the key pillars of democracy, female inclusion in decision-making structures is thus paramount. Section 2 of the 2022 Gender Act, for example, focuses on Public Elections and Appointment into Office and reaffirms the provision of Section 58.2 of the Public Elections Act of 2022, which in turn requires that for every three candidates nominated for electoral positions, one must be a woman. (Parliament of Sierra Leone, 2022). This provision may be regarded as insignificant because of women's high involvement as participants in the political process. Still, it is however essential, as their exclusion stems from their inability to become nominated within party structures because of socio-economic challenges, as stated above. Apart from being amongst the key institutions for inclusive participation and accountable representation, people become involved in public life through political parties and support candidates and parties that reflect their views and interests (International IDEA, 2024).

Although there exist debates on the importance of political parties within a democracy, it does not negate the fact that they have been identified as important instruments in recruiting, nominating and voting of candidates for public office (Catón, 2007). They are key structures primarily responsible for the under-representation of women, given their role as the primary 'gatekeepers' to elective positions of power and decision-making at all levels in most countries (International IDEA, 2024). This is an important aspect for Sierra Leonean women

because, for several decades, they have continuously suffered from entrenched patriarchal structures and discrimination within political parties. Although some parties seemingly appear to ‘support’ female inclusion, internal discriminatory attitudes are often ignored. Even when given seats within their respective political parties, many of these seats are regarded as ‘unwinnable’ (Castillejo, 2009:7), as women find it difficult to compete on an equal playing field with their male counterparts.

As a result, being nominated as party representatives for electoral posts seems like a mammoth hurdle that they cannot overcome. For example, the presentation of two female candidates by the Sierra Leone Political Party (SLPP) (as vice president) and the Alliance Democratic Party (ADP) (for president) for the 2012 and 2023 elections, respectively, could be regarded as small gains for female political representation in the country. Although both parties lost the elections, the SLPP garnered 37% of the vote compared to the ADP, which only received 0.16% of the votes (AYV News, 2023a; DeVries, 2012). Importantly, out of the 13 presidential aspirants for the 2023 elections, only one was a female candidate, despite the country adopting the 2022 GEWE Act a few months before the elections. A possible explanation for this outcome might be the lack of adequate time to fully implement the Act’s provisions by all political parties.

Currently, the Sierra Leonean parliament consists of 149 members, of which 135 are directly elected from across 16 districts, while 14 are paramount chiefs appointed from the 14 rural districts (Parliament of Sierra Leone, 2025). As a governance component, female entry to parliament is important since they can influence and design policies to attend to issues often left unaddressed. Their political parties’ representation, therefore, translates to parliament. For several years, female parliamentary representation has been downward since the country’s transition to multipartyism in 2002. Their parliamentary representation during the four electoral cycles (2002, 2007, 2012 and 2018) failed to reach the 30% minimum provision of global and regional gender frameworks. In the 2002 elections, for instance (under the PR electoral system),



156 women contested for the 80 parliamentary seats, but only 18 (including two paramount chiefs) were elected. Despite there being a female deputy speaker, only six women (out of 23) were elected chairpersons of committees (Lahai, 2015:132–148). In addition, with the reintroduction of the FPTP electoral system, 64 women contested the 2007 elections, and only 16 (out of 112 seats) (13.5%) were successful. Only five women were committee chairs and no female paramount chief (Abdullah, 2010). Also, female contestation for the 2012 elections stood at 65, with only 15 (12%) elected. Data from the 2018 elections showed that women garnered only 18 (12%) out of 132 available seats (Kallon, 2023). Although the implementation of the Act witnessed a surge in female parliamentary representation during the 2023 elections, with them winning 41 (30.4%) out of the 135 seats, only one woman was indirectly elected as paramount chief (IPU, 2023). Despite recent data indicating the progress made when compared to previous elections, it is evident that much still needs to be performed to achieve more female parliamentary representation.

Female presence in constituencies is a determinant of favourable conditions for their growth as politicians within a party. Even when women contest for elections as independent or political party candidates, they cannot compete equally with men because of the existence of systemic patriarchal challenges. The 2022 GEWE Act could offer women a solid guarantee for parliamentary representation whereby they could influence policies and offer them an opportunity to participate in discussions where pertinent programmes are discussed on one hand and present them with a platform where they could raise issues deemed unimportant by others.

Furthermore, Section three of the 2022 GEWE Act requires that under due consideration from the president, women should be appointed to occupy at least 30% of cabinet positions and other government positions. For appointments to public office made by persons other than the president, at least 30% should be women (Parliament of Sierra Leone, 2022). This is important, as female cabinet representation in the country has been minimal since 2002. For instance, from the 21 ministerial

positions, only three women were appointed ministers in 2007 and by May 2010, there was only one remaining and three deputies (Abdullah, 2010). Even when appointed, women are usually given ministerial positions with less important portfolios such as Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Marine Resources and Fisheries, Foreign Affairs or Social Welfare, Gender and Children Affairs or act as deputies to men (Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, 2014). However, under Bio's government, there has been a modest improvement of 41% with the appointment of eight ministers (out of 26 ministers) and six deputy ministers (out of 21 ministers) as against three and five ministers (including deputies) under former presidents Tejan Kabbah and Bai Koroma respectively (Kanu, 2011). Apart from women occupying portfolios with less significance, as stated above, some women now occupy important ministries such as Higher and Technical Education, posts in the Vice President's Office and act as Deputy Minister of Finance (AYN News, 2023b).

Although the presence of more women in Maada's cabinet is an excellent start for their political participation, the language used in the 2022 GEWE Act could be problematic, as it gives the president sufficient powers to make appointments solely at his discretion. President Maada has indicated his willingness to support gender equity by signing the Act. However, there is no guarantee that the gender quota will be consistently implemented by his successor with such a vague provision. This opens the avenue for manipulating the Act, since it does not require actual commitment from the president.

Whether legislated, reserved seats, or party quotas, they have significantly reduced gender gaps in politics and decision-making in most states. Rwanda, for example, stands as a beacon of hope for female political representation, with more than two-thirds of women holding legislative seats and 50% for legislative seats cabinet positions and especially in Sierra Leone (UN Women, 2024). Also, Senegal has 46% of women holding parliamentary seats, while South Africa has over 44% of women's parliamentary representation (UN Women, 2024). This further echoes the belief that the most apparent benefit of quotas is to improve descriptive representation, which is

essential for achieving broader gender equality. In other words, if more women run for office, then even more will test the limits of what is possible for political representation or be encouraged to run for office because of the role model effect in which they see people like themselves winning seats (Nayar, 2021).

Even though many scholars believe that the adoption of quotas has helped to fast-track female representation in legislatures, others regard it as a numbers game which has not only succeeded in introducing more women into parliaments but also those who are unqualified (Gouws, 2011:70–89). Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2005:27), for instance, affirm that quotas can be used to consolidate female parliamentary representation after a significant number of women have already been voted into parliament after a long while. For instance, it took 60 years for most Scandinavian countries to reach the 20% mark for female representation. However, there exist perceptions that quotas undermine democracy, as they are unfairly advantageous to one group (women) over the other (men). Quotas are believed to manipulate the choices of voters as they may be tailored to fit specific roles or act as a detriment to women by implying that they cannot be elected on their own, as they will need government or political parties' intervention to succeed in politics (Nayar, 2021). Although the above assertions may be acceptable, they do not negate the fact that women need quotas as a point of departure for their inclusion in democratic governance. Since democracy requires the equal participation and representation of all groups within a political system, the only way to increase female political representation (especially young women) is by implementing some form of affirmative action. For example, the historic election of two young Sierra Leonean women, Sia Mahawa Tommy and Alice Kornya Sandy (aged 27 and 28), as parliamentarians from the Kono and Kenema districts (Parker, 2023) respectively, indicates the importance of quotas, as they have come to represent hopes and aspirations for many young women in the country.

Tappe Ortiz and Kobrich (2022) contend that although quotas have increased female political representation, it has not changed the general rules of politics, which could create

avenues for women to enter leadership positions at all levels. This is important, as the existence of gender stereotypes and cultural norms affecting female political participation have continually impeded female political growth. For this reason, female involvement during the drafting and implementation of policies affecting them is important and will lead to substantive results. Therefore, the 2022 GEWE Act is a step in the right direction for the inclusion of women in democratic governance and will further increase their representation in future elections.

### Conclusion

This chapter examined the state of female representation in democratic governance in Sierra Leone. Enhancing female political participation in democratic governance has been a growing phenomenon in Sierra Leone for many decades. Promoters of gender equality have consistently reiterated the importance of the inclusion of women in all aspects of democratic governance and the need to address systemic challenges that they face in politics. Since democracy involves equal participation of all groups in society (including women), excluding one group of the population will be detrimental to its consolidation.

During four electoral cycles (2002–2018), Sierra Leonean women's participation in democratic governance has been minimal despite the existence of global and regional gender frameworks, which required the implementation of at least a 30% quota to increase their representation. Many political actors have regarded the 2022 GEWE Act as a departure point for enhancing women's political participation by offering them avenues to influence policies to address issues prohibiting them from fully participating in politics.

The chapter found that as a legislated quota, the 2022 GEWE Act is a step in the right direction, as it not only attains the provision of SDG 5 but increases women in positions of accountability by 2030. With the systemic challenges that women face in politics, some form of affirmation is needed. Therefore, the effectiveness of the 2022 GEWE Act is hinged

on the willingness of all political stakeholders to ensure its implementation and the strengthening of other existing gender frameworks to promote women's participation in democratic governance. Since political parties are important for women, as they are widely regarded as an entry point for them in politics, their processes should be transparent and inclusive. Also, addressing the root causes of female political participation is paramount to ensuring their participation in democratic governance.

Beyond guaranteeing quotas, it is imperative to constantly evaluate the 2022 GEWE Act, which will not only strengthen its status but will also assist in highlighting women's political issues. In other words, enforcing gender frameworks and policies is not enough to facilitate female democracy, but assessing their relevance is also important. The implementation of quotas has become increasingly popular, and although its progress may be slow, it is an important means of increasing female political representation. More encouraging is the general receptiveness towards adopting the Act, as this will translate to the high involvement of women in future electoral processes in the country.

## References

- Abdullah, H.J. (2010). Forging ahead without an affirmative action policy: Female politicians in Sierra Leone's post-war electoral process. *IDS Bulletin*, 41(5), 62–71. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2010.00167.x>
- Albright, M. (2010). *Remarks of Madeleine Albright at NDI 25 Anniversary Dinner*. National Democratic Institute (NDI). [Online]. Available at: [https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Madeleine\\_Albright\\_Speech\\_NDI25.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Madeleine_Albright_Speech_NDI25.pdf)
- Ara, F. (2019). Barriers to the political participation of women: A global perspective. *Society & Change*, 13(4), 7–22.
- AYV News. (2023a). *ADP Nominates Woman Presidential Candidate For June Elections*. AYV News, 10 May 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://ayvnews.com/adp-nominates-woman-presidential-candidate-for-june-elections/>

- AYV News. (2023b). *President Bio makes first appointments, 41 women representations*. AYV News, 11 July 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://ayvnews.com/president-bio-makes-first-appointments-41-women-representation/>
- Badri, B. & Tripp, A.M. (eds.) (2017). *Women's activism in Africa: Struggles for rights and representation*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350224117>
- Ballington, J. (2011). *Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties. A Good Practices Guide to Promote Women's Political Participation*. United Nations Development Programme and National Democratic Institute. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Empowering-women-for-stronger-political-parties-eng.pdf>
- Bauer, G. (2012). 'Let there be a balance': Women in African Parliaments. *Political Studies Review*, 10(3), 370–384. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-9302.2012.00272.x>
- Beer, C. (2009). Democracy and gender equality. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 44(2009), 212–227. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-009-9043-2>
- Berry, M.E., Bouka, Y. & Kamuru, M. (2021). Implementing inclusion: gender quotas, inequality, and backlash in Kenya. *Politics & Gender*, 17(4), 640–664. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X19000886>
- Brody, A. (2009). *Gender & governance*. Gender and Development, InBrief, Bridge Bulletin 21. [Online]. Available at: <https://catalogue.safaid.net/sites/default/files/publications/gender%20and%20governance.pdf>
- Bryson, V. (2003). *Feminist political theory: An introduction*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) New York: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-00576-1>
- Catón, M. (2007). *Effective party assistance. Stronger parties for a better democracy*. Stockholm.
- Castillejo, C. (2009). *Women's political participation and influence in Sierra Leone*. Madrid: FRIDE.
- Creswell, J. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Dahl, R.A. (2004). *Democratic Polities in Advanced Countries: Success and Challenge*. New Worldwide Hegemony. Buenos Aires: Clacso. [Online]. Available at: <https://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/clacso/se/20100613064324/4Dahl.pdf>
- Dahlerup, D. (2013). *Women, Quotas and Politics*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203099544>
- Dahlerup, D. & Freidenvall, L. (2005). Quotas as a 'fast track' to equal representation for women: Why Scandinavia is no longer the model. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7(1), 26–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461674042000324673>
- DeVries, N. (2012). *Sierra Leone Women Struggle for Political Role*. VOANEWS, 28 November 2012. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/sierra-leone-women-struggle-for-political-role/1554869.html>
- Dube, C. (2023). *Closing the Gender Gap in Africa*. GGA, 2 April 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://gga.org/closing-the-gender-gap-in-africa/>
- Du Pisani, A. (2007). Democratic governance and security: A conceptual exploration. In: Cawthra, G., du Pisani, A. & Omari, A. (eds.) *Security and democracy in Southern Africa*, pp. 1–22. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Fortune, F., Chungong, C. & Kessinger, A. (2011). *Community radio, gender & ICTs in West Africa: How women are engaging with community radio through mobile phone technologies*. Centre for Media and Transitional Societies (CMTS), Carleton University, Toronto.
- Foulds, K. (2014). Buzzwords at play: gender, education, and political participation in Kenya. *Gender and Education*, 26(6), 653–671. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2014.933190>
- Fukuyama, F. (2014). States and democracy. *Democratisation*, 21(7), 1326–1340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.960208>
- Goetz, A.M. (2007). Political cleaners: Women as the new anti-corruption force? *Development and Change*, 38(1), 87–105. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.2007.00404.x>
- Gouws, A. (2011). Women's representation in government: Quotas, substantive equality and self-interested politicians. *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, 77(1), 70–89. <https://doi.org/10.1353/trn.2011.0039>

- Grugel, J. & Piper, N. (2007). *Critical perspectives on global governance: Rights and regulation in governing regimes*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203933602>
- Guell, P. (2002). *Subjetividad Social y Desarrollo*. Chapters Collection. Document No. 42, Instituto Internacional de Gobernabilidad.
- Gumede, W. (2021). *South Africa Needs a New Democratic Governance Model to Overcome the Multiple Crises Caused by COVID-19. Policy Brief 37*. Democracy Works Foundation.
- Hillygus, D.S. (2005). The missing link: Exploring the relationship between higher education and political engagement. *Political Behavior*, 27(1), 25–47. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-005-3075-8>
- Högström, J. (2015). Do development and democracy positively affect gender equality in cabinets?. *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 16(3), 332–356. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1468109915000225>
- International IDEA. (2024). *Women's Political Participation: Africa Barometer 2024*. Sweden. International IDEA. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/womens-political-participation-africa-barometer-2021.pdf>
- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). (2023). *Record Number of Women Elected in Sierra Leone*. IPU, 12 July 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2023-07/record-number-women-mps-elected-in-sierra-leone>
- Isma'ila, Y. & Madu, A.Y. (2016). Democratic transition in Nigeria: Towards understanding the disguise of international dynamics challenging the Fourth Republic consolidation. In: Mohamad, B. (ed.) *Challenge of ensuring research rigor in soft sciences*, vol 14, pp. 289–295. European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences. Future Academy. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2016.08.41>
- Jamal, A.A. (2010). *Democratic governance and women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)*. International Development Research Centre (IDRC). [Online]. Available at: <https://id1-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/1af1221d-fc80-4212-84fa-22641433110e/content>



- Kabeer, N. (2015). Gender, poverty, and inequality: a brief history of feminist contributions in the field of international development. *Gender & Development*, 23(2), 189–205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2015.1062300>
- Kanu, K. (2011). *President Ernest Koroma has Done more to empower women in Sierra Leone than the SLPP or any other Regime*. Cocrioko, 21 November 2011. [Online]. Available at: <https://cocorioko.net/president-ernest-koroma-has-done-more-to-empower-women-in-sierra-leone-than-the-slpp-or-any-other-regime/>
- Kallon, Y. (2023). Women in Political Participation: The Case Sierra Leone. GEST. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.grocentre.is/gest/moya/gro/index/publication/women-in-political-participation-the-case-of-sierra-leone>
- Kellow, T. (2010). *Women, elections and violence in West Africa: Assessing women's political participation in Liberia and Sierra Leone*. London: International Alert.
- Kim, J.H. (2019). Direct democracy and women's political engagement. *American Journal of Political Science*, 63(3), 594–610. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12420>
- Kim, P.S., Halligan, J., Cho, N., Oh, C.H. & Eikenberry, A.M. (2005). Toward participatory and transparent governance: Report on the sixth global forum on reinventing government. *Public Administration Review*, 65(6), 646–654. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2005.00494.x>
- Lahai, J.I. (2015). Gendering conflict and peace-building in Sierra Leone. In: Shekhawat, S. (ed.) *Female combatants in conflict and peace: Challenging gender in violence and post-conflict reintegration*, pp. 132–148. London: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137516565\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137516565_9)
- Lamin, B. (2023). *Thirty percent Women's representation in Sierra Leone 6th Parliament: A Historic Achievement, Congratulations to the 41 Women Elected*. Rainbow Initiative. [Online]. Available at: <https://rainboinitiative.org/thirty-percent-womens-representation-in-sierra-leone-6th-parliament/>

- Malena, C. (2009). Building political will for participatory governance: An introduction. In: Malena, C. (ed.) *From political won't to political will: Building support for participatory governance*, pp: 3-30. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Moghadam, V.M. (2011). *The gender of democracy: Why it Matters in the Middle East and North Africa*. ISA, Purdue University.
- Morojele, P. (2011). What does it mean to be a boy? Implications for girls' and boys' schooling experiences in Lesotho rural schools. *Gender and Education*, 23(6), 677-693. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2010.527828>
- Mensah-Kutin, R. (2010). *Democratic governance and women's rights in West Africa*. International Development Research Centre (IDRC). [Online]. Available at: <https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/8fc01e30-23e1-4c5e-8e95-7e5b6ddcf6a1/content>
- Milligan, L. (2014). 'They are not serious like the boys': Gender norms and contradictions for girls in rural Kenya. *Gender and Education*, 26(5), 465-476. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2014.927837>
- Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs. (2014). *Country Report by Sierra Leone on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000)*. Government of Sierra Leone. [Online]. Available at: [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/13190Sierra\\_Leone\\_review\\_Beijing20.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/13190Sierra_Leone_review_Beijing20.pdf)
- Munck, G. (2005). Measuring democratic governance: Central tasks and basic problems. In: Narayan-Parker, D. (ed.) *Measuring empowerment: Cross-disciplinary perspectives*, pp 427-459. Washington DC: The World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e597202012-020>
- Narayan-Parker, D. (ed.) (2005). *Measuring empowerment: Cross-disciplinary perspectives*. Washington DC: World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1037/e597202012-001>
- Nayar, J. (2021). Equal representation? The debate over gender quotas in Africa's parliaments. *African Studies Review*, 64(1), 159-175.

- Nyamweda, T. (2023). Gender equality in and through the media in Southern Africa. *The handbook of gender, communication and women's human rights*, 321–335. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119800729.ch20>
- Obianyo, N. (2012). Globalization and democracy in Africa: The experience of Nigeria– 1999–2007. *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Political Science*, 3(1), 179–202.
- Ofusori, L. (2021). *Strengthening women's political participation and decision making in South Africa*. para.1–8.
- Opuku, M., Anyango, B. & Alupo, B. (2018). Women in politics in Kenya: An analysis of participation and barriers. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies*, 7(1), 1506–1530. <https://doi.org/10.17583/generos.2018.3179>
- Parker, A. (2023). *Sierra Leone's Youth Envoy Congratulates Young Parliamentarians*. Sierraloaded. [Online]. Available at: <https://sierraloaded.sl/news/envoy-congratulates-parliamentarians/>
- Parliament of Sierra Leone. (2022). *BILL. Supplement to the Sierra Leone Extraordinary Gazette Vol. CXLXII, No. 45. The Gender Empowerment Act, 2021*. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.parliament.gov.sl/uploads/bill\\_files/The%20Gender%20Empowerment%20Act,%202021.pdf](https://www.parliament.gov.sl/uploads/bill_files/The%20Gender%20Empowerment%20Act,%202021.pdf)
- Parliament of Sierra Leone. (2025). *Understanding Parliament. Important Facts and Processes You Need to Know About Parliament of Sierra Leone*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.parliament.gov.sl/understanding-parliament.html>
- Reilly, B. (2015). Electoral systems. In: Case, W. (ed.) *Routledge handbook of Southeast Asian Democratization*, pp: 225–236. London: Routledge
- Rogers, M. (2011). Women, politics and decision-making in Sierra Leone. *Ghana Journal of Development Studies*, 8(1), 50–71. <https://doi.org/10.4314/gjds.v8i1.4>
- Sidhu, G. & Meena, R. (2007). *Electoral Financing to Advance Women's Political Participation: A Guide for UNDP Support*. [Online]. Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/678797?ln=en&v=pdf>
- Sivi-Njonjo, K. (2016). The path towards inclusive democracy in Kenya. *Gender and Political Processes in Kenya*, 67–90.

- Tappe Ortiz, J. & Köbrich, J. (2022). Queen Mothers: Women in Leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa. *GIGA Focus Africa*, 5(2022)
- True, J., Niner. S., Parashar, S. & George, N. (2012). *Women's political participation in Asia and the Pacific*. In: SSRC Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum
- United Nations (UN). (2024). *Why so Few Women are in Political Leadership, and Five Actions to Boost Women's Political Participation*. UN. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2024/09/five-actions-to-boost-womens-political-participation>
- United Nations (UN) Women. (2024). *Women in Parliament: Slow Progress Towards Equal Representation*. UN. [Online]. Available at: <https://africarenewal.un.org/en/magazine/women-parliament-slow-progress-towards-equal-representation#:~:text=Highlights-,Sub%2DSaharan%20Africa%20recorded%20the%20highest%20improvement%20among%20all%20regions,%2C%20Benin%20and%20Sierra%20Leone>.
- United Nations (UN) Women. (2025). *Facts and Figures: Women's Leadership and Political Participation*. UN. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-womens-leadership-and-political-participation#:~:text=Basic%20Hero%20Banner,political%20life%20is%20far%20off>
- Verge, T. & Pastor, R. (2018). Women's political firsts and symbolic representation. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 39(1), 26-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2016.1268878>
- Zafarullah, H. (1999). Consolidating democratic governance: One step forward, two steps back. In: Alauddin, M. & Hasan, S. (eds.) *Development, governance and the environment in South Asia: A focus on Bangladesh*, pp: 181-193. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-27631-8\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-27631-8_10)
- Zetterberg, P. (2009). Do gender quotas foster women's political engagement? Lessons from Latin America. *Political Research Quarterly*, 62(4), 715-730. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912908322411>

## Chapter Eleven

# Women in Leadership and the Promotion of Accountability in Local Governance: Evaluating the Role of Female Leaders in Ekurhuleni Municipality

Beauty Shiviti 

*Centre for Race, Gender and Class  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa  
beautyshiviti@yahoo.com*

### Introduction

The persistent marginalisation of women as political actors in governance remains a significant challenge globally and within the South African context. While notable strides have been made in increasing women's political representation, critical questions persist regarding their substantive influence on fostering accountability and combatting corruption, particularly in local governance structures. This chapter investigates the role of women leaders in promoting ethical governance and transparency within the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality – one of Gauteng, South Africa's municipalities most affected by corruption, as indicated by the 2021 Corruption Watch report (Corruption Watch, 2021a). With 354 reported corruption cases, Ekurhuleni ranks second only to Johannesburg, emphasising the urgency of effective leadership and accountability mechanisms in the region.

Drawing on qualitative research involving 20 in-depth interviews with female politicians, municipal officials, and

community leaders, this study explored the extent to which women's increased presence in local government translates into tangible governance outcomes. Specifically, it examined whether and how women leaders have contributed to promoting accountability, transparency, and ethical conduct since 2021. The chapter engages with feminist, governance network, and social role theories to critically assess women's leadership paradigms in metropolitan municipalities.

Women leaders are often associated with inclusive decision-making, a stronger emphasis on transparency, and advocacy for marginalised groups (Marumo T, 2014). Their potential to advance accountability in governance structures is substantial; however, their effectiveness is frequently mediated by political and cultural contexts, resource constraints, and resistance from entrenched interests (Khupuza N, 2021; Naidoo, 2017). This chapter critically analyses these structural and systemic challenges, acknowledging that persistent gender-based discrimination and institutional limitations can hinder women leaders' capacity to sustain reform-oriented governance.

By examining performance records and case studies of female leaders within Ekurhuleni, the study evaluates the intersections of gender and governance, revealing the opportunities and limitations of women's influence in curbing corruption and promoting accountability. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on gender and governance in South Africa, offering nuanced insights into the transformative potential of women's leadership. The chapter concludes with actionable policy recommendations aimed at enhancing governance programmes that embed accountability and gender sensitivity at the local government level.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical foundation for this chapter is built upon three interrelated theories: Feminist Political Economy Theory, Governance Network Theory, and Social Role Theory. These frameworks provide a multidimensional perspective to analyse the role of women in leadership and their influence on

accountability within local governance structures, particularly in the Ekurhuleni Municipality.

Feminist Political Economy Theory provides a critical lens to examine the intersections of gender, power, and economic structures in governance. This theory emphasises the role of women as political and economic actors who challenge existing patriarchal norms and advocate for inclusive governance. Feminist Political Economy Theory highlights that gender inequalities are deeply embedded in political and financial systems, often marginalising women from decision-making processes (Rai & Waylen, 2014). By their lived experiences and perspectives, women leaders bring attention to issues often overlooked, such as social justice, equity, and accountability in governance.

Applying this theory in Ekurhuleni Municipality allows for an evaluation of how women's participation in leadership influences accountability mechanisms. By addressing systemic barriers such as gender-based discrimination and resource inequities, this framework facilitates understanding the structural challenges women face and their strategies to overcome these hurdles in advancing accountability (Elson, 2017). Moreover, feminist political economy emphasises the importance of institutional reforms and gender-sensitive policies to ensure women's effective leadership in governance.

Governance Network Theory, on the other hand, explores the dynamic interactions between public, private, and civil society actors in achieving governance objectives. It defines governance as a horizontal and collaborative process where diverse stakeholders coordinate to deliver public policies and services (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012). This theory is particularly relevant in understanding the role of women in leadership within the complex governance structures of metropolitan municipalities like Ekurhuleni.

In the context of this chapter, Governance Network Theory provides insights into how women leaders navigate and influence governance networks to promote accountability. Women in leadership often advocate for transparent decision-

making and ethical practices within these networks, addressing systemic corruption and inefficiencies (Pierre & Peters, 2020). By using their roles in governance, women leaders can foster partnerships and build coalitions that prioritise accountability and service delivery. Governance Network Theory also highlights women's challenges in these collaborative environments, including resistance from entrenched interests and limited access to power structures. Addressing these challenges requires an inclusive governance approach that empowers women and integrates their contributions into decision-making processes, ensuring accountability at all levels of municipal administration.

The Social Role Theory examines how societal expectations and gender norms influence behaviour and opportunities. It posits that gender roles are shaped by the division of labour and cultural stereotypes, which assign specific attributes and responsibilities to men and women (Eagly, 1987). In governance, these roles often dictate women leaders' perception and capacity to drive accountability.

Applying Social Role Theory to the Ekurhuleni Municipality highlights the societal expectations that shape women's leadership experiences. Women leaders are often expected to adopt nurturing and collaborative approaches, which can be advantageous in fostering inclusive governance and transparency (Schneider, DJ & Bos, AE, 2019). However, these expectations can also limit their authority and effectiveness if perceived as deviating from traditional gender norms. This framework enables an analysis of how gender stereotypes influence the effectiveness of women leaders in promoting accountability. By challenging these stereotypes and redefining gender roles, Social Role Theory provides a pathway to recognise and validate women's leadership contributions, enhancing their capacity to implement accountability measures.

Integrating Feminist Political Economy Theory, Governance Network Theory, and Social Role Theory offers a comprehensive understanding of women's leadership and accountability in local governance. Feminist Political Economy Theory addresses structural inequalities, Governance Network



Theory emphasises collaborative governance dynamics, and Social Role Theory sheds light on societal expectations and stereotypes. Together, these frameworks provide a robust foundation for analysing the contributions of women leaders in Ekurhuleni Municipality and identifying strategies to enhance accountability and transparency in governance.

## **Governance Framework and Role of Women in Accountability**

The role of women in leadership has been widely explored in governance studies, highlighting their potential to foster accountability, inclusivity, and ethical practices. Despite this recognition, gaps persist in understanding how female leadership impacts local governance contexts, particularly in regions like the Ekurhuleni Municipality. This literature review synthesises existing studies on women's leadership, accountability, and governance, identifying the advancements in the field and the areas that warrant further exploration.

## **Women in Leadership and Governance**

Existing research emphasises the transformative impact of women leaders on governance practices. Studies argue that women often bring distinct values, such as inclusivity, transparency, and collaboration, to leadership roles (Marumo D, 2014). These attributes are associated with fostering accountability and reducing corruption. Naidoo (2017) highlights that women's leadership tends to prioritise community-centred governance and ethical decision-making, which can address systemic issues like corruption in municipalities. However, the extent to which these attributes are effectively implemented in practice varies depending on contextual factors, including political, social, and institutional dynamics (Khupuza T, 2021).

Feminist scholars emphasise the importance of viewing women's leadership through an intersectional lens, acknowledging that race, class, and other identity markers influence their governance experiences (Adejumo-Ayibiowu, 2015). However, there is limited empirical evidence on how

these dynamics play out within local governance structures in South Africa, including municipalities like Ekurhuleni. This highlights a need for localised studies that account for women leaders' unique challenges and opportunities in these settings.

Nel and Jerome (2022) highlight the importance of integrating social, political, and economic stakeholders to achieve efficiency in local governance. In South Africa, the legislative and policy framework directing governance and accountability includes the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No. 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996), the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (Batho Pele, People First) of 1997 (DPSA, 1997), the White Paper on Local Government of 1998 (COGTA), the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act (MStA), Act No. 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998), and the Local Government: Municipal Property Rates Act (MPRA) No. 6 of 2004 (RSA, 2004). These documents collectively provide a robust legal foundation to promote democratic and accountable governance.

Khupuzo N (2021) cautions against ascribing sole responsibility for accountability to women leaders, emphasising that their contributions are contingent upon the support systems and institutional structures in place. Women leaders play a key role in fostering inclusivity and amplifying the voices of marginalised groups, but these efforts require a conducive environment to be effective. Nel and Jerome (2022) further stress the importance of transparent communication between leaders and communities, which fosters trust and engagement, essential for sustainable service delivery.

Governance in Ekurhuleni Municipality, like other South African regions, benefits from inclusivity that elevates the perspectives of marginalised groups, including women, children, and youth (Nel & Jerome, 2022). Empowerment initiatives and accountability mechanisms, such as performance scorecards, allow communities to hold public officials accountable (Kraai et al., 2023). These tools ensure that governance remains focused on transparency, responsiveness, and equitable service delivery.

## **Accountability in Local Governance and Women's Role in Promoting Accountability in Local Governance**

Accountability is a recurring issue in local governance globally, and South Africa is no exception (Ngcamu, 2019a). Reports such as the 2021 Corruption Watch (Corruption Watch, 2021a) report indicate that municipalities like Ekurhuleni struggle with systemic corruption, with 354 cases reported, making it one of Gauteng's most affected areas. Governance scholars argue that accountability failures are often tied to entrenched power structures and a lack of oversight mechanisms (Pierre & Peters, 2020). While women's leadership is frequently suggested as a remedy for such governance challenges, empirical studies assessing their direct impact on accountability outcomes are scarce.

Emerging research suggests that female leaders may play a critical role in fostering accountability because of their propensity to challenge entrenched norms and advocate for transparency (Marumo T, 2014; Naidoo, 2017). However, Khupuza N (2021) notes that systemic barriers, including gender discrimination, lack of resources, and resistance from male counterparts, often constrain women's ability to influence governance outcomes. This creates a significant gap in the literature on how women navigate these challenges and whether they can impact accountability in local governance settings like Ekurhuleni meaningfully.

Women's engagement in local governance is transformative, addressing systemic challenges and fostering accountability. Sithole and Mathonsi (2015) highlight that women bring diverse skills and unique perspectives to leadership roles, positively impacting governance outcomes. However, Naidoo L and Ramphal RR (2019) argue that entrenched political dynamics often restrict women's participation, limiting their potential to influence governance significantly. Despite these barriers, women leaders in Ekurhuleni Municipality have made use of their networks and prioritised welfare-oriented policies

to advance transparency and accountability (Alexander et al., 2023b).

The resilience of women leaders is particularly evident in their opposition to electoral clientelism, where candidates exploit communities with material promises to secure votes. Such practices undermine genuine political engagement and public trust. By prioritising ethical governance, women leaders can counteract these dynamics and champion initiatives that align with community needs and aspirations.

### **Gendered Perspectives on Leadership and Accountability**

Theoretical frameworks such as Feminist Political Economy Theory, Governance Network Theory, and Social Role Theory provide valuable lenses for understanding the relationship between gender and governance. Feminist Political Economy Theory emphasises the structural inequalities that limit women's participation in leadership roles and their ability to effect change (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2020). Governance Network Theory highlights the collaborative nature of governance and the importance of inclusive decision-making processes, which align with women's leadership styles (Pierre & Peters, 2020). Social Role Theory explores how societal expectations and stereotypes influence women's leadership experiences, offering insights into the barriers that they face in promoting accountability (Schneider MC & Bos AL, 2019).

Despite these theoretical advancements, there is limited application of these frameworks in the South African local governance context. Most studies focus on national or regional governance, overlooking the unique dynamics of municipalities like Ekurhuleni. Additionally, few studies critically assess the effectiveness of women's leadership in combatting specific issues such as corruption and accountability failures in these settings.

## **Corruption and Accountability Deficits in Ekurhuleni Municipality**

Corruption remains a pervasive challenge in many local governance structures, including the Ekurhuleni Municipality in South Africa. Weak accountability mechanisms are a central factor exacerbating corruption, enabling unethical practices to flourish. Transparency International (2017) defines corruption as the misuse of entrusted power for private gain, which can manifest as grand corruption, petty corruption, or political corruption. These corrupt practices undermine the efficacy of governance and hinder service delivery, disproportionately impacting vulnerable and marginalised communities that rely on essential public services.

The manifestations of corruption in Ekurhuleni Municipality range from grand-scale misappropriation of funds to small-scale bribery and political clientelism. These corrupt activities divert critical resources from their intended purposes, leading to inefficiencies in public service delivery and increased mistrust amongst community members (Plaatjie, 2019). For example, resources allocated for infrastructure development or basic services such as water, sanitation, and housing are often siphoned off, leaving marginalised communities to bear the brunt of these deficits.

Furthermore, political corruption, including the manipulation of public office for personal or partisan gain, undermines democratic principles and accountability. Electoral clientelism, where political candidates exploit communities by offering material incentives for votes, exemplifies such corruption. This practice erodes genuine political engagement, distorts public service priorities, and perpetuates cycles of inequality (Transparency International, 2017).

Weak accountability structures create an enabling environment for corruption. Ngcamu (2019a) highlights that inadequate oversight mechanisms allow unethical practices to persist unchecked. In Ekurhuleni Municipality, the absence of robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks has contributed to systemic governance failures. These deficiencies hinder the

ability of local governments to enforce transparency, track public expenditures, and penalise corrupt activities effectively. The lack of accountability mechanisms also exacerbates socioeconomic disparities. Skenjana et al. (2019b) argue that corruption disproportionately impacts marginalised groups, as public resources intended for essential services such as healthcare, education, and housing are diverted. This misallocation of resources exacerbates poverty and inequality, further entrenching systemic barriers to development.

Corruption erodes public trust, a critical component of effective governance. Citizens lose confidence in their leaders and institutions when governance structures fail to deliver promised services and lack transparency. According to Corruption Watch (2021a), Ekurhuleni Municipality is one of the municipalities with the highest levels of corruption complaints. These complaints highlight governance failures that undermine public trust and foster disengagement from civic processes. Public trust is further diminished when accountability mechanisms fail to address corruption allegations promptly and effectively. The absence of punitive measures against corrupt officials perpetuates a culture of impunity, where unethical practices become normalised. This situation not only undermines governance but also poses significant challenges to fostering sustainable development in the municipality.

Addressing corruption and accountability deficits in Ekurhuleni Municipality requires comprehensive reforms. Strengthening oversight mechanisms is essential to enhance transparency and ensure that public officials are held accountable for their actions. Ngcamu (2019a) suggests that monitoring and evaluation frameworks, coupled with citizen-driven accountability initiatives, can deter corrupt practices and promote ethical governance. Furthermore, anti-corruption policies must be rigorously implemented to penalise corrupt activities and restore public trust. Community engagement is also critical in fostering transparency and accountability. By involving citizens in decision-making processes and creating platforms for their voices to be heard, local governments can

rebuild trust and enhance governance outcomes (Skenjana et al., 2019c).

Corruption and accountability deficits are significant challenges in Ekurhuleni Municipality, undermining governance efficacy and disproportionately affecting marginalised communities. Weak oversight mechanisms, coupled with systemic inequalities, perpetuate unethical practices that hinder service delivery and erode public trust. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that includes strengthening accountability structures, implementing anti-corruption policies, and fostering community engagement. By prioritising these reforms, Ekurhuleni Municipality can pave the way for more transparent, equitable, and effective governance.

### **Women Leaders as Accountability Advocates**

The role of women leaders in championing accountability and transparency within local governance structures cannot be overstated. In the Ekurhuleni Municipality, women leaders have consistently demonstrated their ability to navigate systemic barriers and address pressing community concerns. Their efforts in promoting gender equality, healthcare, and economic empowerment significantly improve governance outcomes. However, achieving meaningful accountability remains challenging, requiring systemic reforms and efforts to address gender-based discrimination and enhance women's representation in governance structures.

Women leaders bring distinct perspectives to governance, often prioritising the welfare of their communities over partisan or personal interests. Naidoo R and Ramphal R (2019) argue that women in leadership positions frequently advocate for transparency, ethical decision-making, and accountability. These leaders emphasise community-centric policies and foster inclusive governance by amplifying the voices of marginalised groups, particularly women, children, and youth. In Ekurhuleni, women leaders have initiated welfare-oriented programmes that address systemic inequities and enhance transparency in resource allocation (Alexander et al., 2023b). Their active

engagement in tackling issues such as healthcare access and economic empowerment demonstrates their commitment to accountability. By focusing on transparency in budgetary processes and equitable service delivery, women leaders ensure that public resources are allocated efficiently and effectively to meet community needs.

Despite their contributions, women leaders often encounter systemic barriers that hinder their ability to achieve meaningful accountability. Gender-based discrimination entrenched patriarchal norms, and political dynamics continue to limit women's representation and influence in governance. Sithole and Mathonsi (2015) highlight the pervasive structural challenges that prevent women from ascending to leadership positions and fully exercising their authority in governance. Furthermore, cultural norms and societal expectations often undervalue women's leadership capabilities, perpetuating gender disparities in political participation. As a result, women leaders face heightened scrutiny and resistance, undermining their efforts to promote transparency and accountability. These challenges necessitate targeted interventions to dismantle systemic barriers and create an enabling environment for women's leadership to thrive.

Improving the representation of women in governance is a critical step towards fostering accountability. Women's participation in decision-making processes ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, resulting in more inclusive and equitable governance outcomes. Naidoo R and Ramphal R (2019) emphasise the importance of representation in addressing the unique needs and concerns of marginalised groups. In Ekurhuleni, women leaders have used their networks and advocacy platforms to advance accountability initiatives. By promoting participatory governance and engaging communities in decision-making, they strengthen public trust and foster greater transparency (Nel & Jerome, 2022). However, these efforts must be complemented by institutional reforms that prioritise gender equity in political appointments and policymaking processes.



The leadership of women in governance structures, particularly in Ekurhuleni, has tangible benefits for community welfare and governance. Women leaders' focus on ethical governance, anti-corruption measures, and social accountability mechanisms contributes to sustainable development. Alexander et al. (2023b) note that women's leadership is often associated with reduced corruption levels, as women prioritise policies that promote transparency and public welfare. Through their advocacy, women leaders address critical issues such as healthcare disparities, education gaps, and economic inequalities. Their efforts to promote accountability ensure that public officials are held responsible for their actions, fostering a culture of transparency and ethical governance.

Women leaders in Ekurhuleni Municipality serve as accountability advocates, demonstrating resilience and commitment in addressing systemic challenges. Their contributions to promoting transparency, gender equality, and community welfare enhance the governance landscape. However, achieving meaningful accountability requires sustained efforts to address gender-based discrimination and increase women's representation in governance. Institutional reforms and societal shifts are necessary to create an enabling environment where women leaders can continue to champion accountability and drive transformative change in governance.

## **Identified Gaps and Future Directions**

While existing literature acknowledges the potential of women's leadership to enhance accountability, significant gaps remain in empirical research focusing on local governance contexts. There is a lack of localised studies examining how women leaders in municipalities like Ekurhuleni address corruption and accountability challenges. Furthermore, little attention has been given to the intersectional dynamics that influence women's leadership experiences in these settings. Future research should prioritise case studies and qualitative analyses to provide a nuanced understanding of these dynamics.

Additionally, there is a need for policy-oriented studies that explore strategies for overcoming the barriers that women leaders face in promoting accountability. Such research could inform the design of governance programmes and initiatives aimed at strengthening women's leadership and fostering ethical governance practices at the municipal level. The existing body of literature provides a strong foundation for understanding the relationship between women's leadership and accountability in governance. However, localised studies focusing on municipalities like Ekurhuleni are needed to fill critical gaps and advance this field of research which justify the study. By addressing these gaps, future studies can contribute to the development of effective strategies for making use of women's leadership to promote accountability and reduce corruption in local governance structures.

The intersection of governance, accountability, and women's leadership in Ekurhuleni Municipality highlights the critical role of women as agents of change. While systemic challenges persist, women leaders' contributions to fostering inclusivity, ethical governance, and transparency remain significant. Addressing accountability deficits and corruption through strengthened mechanisms and empowering women leaders is essential for achieving sustainable governance outcomes in the municipality.

### **Findings on Women Leaders as Promoters of Accountability in Governance Structures of Ekurhuleni Municipality**

The findings of this chapter suggest that women leaders in the governance structures of the Ekurhuleni Municipality are significant promoters of accountability. The data revealed that 16 out of 20 respondents (80%) agreed that women leaders enhance accountability, while 20% disagreed. This section elaborates on these findings, integrating insights from interview responses to provide a nuanced understanding of the role of women leaders in promoting accountability.

### **Key Exemplars of Accountability**

Specific examples of women leaders excelling in accountability were noted. Participant 4 praised the leadership style of Tania Campbell, emphasising her ability to delegate tasks effectively and ensure responsibilities were fulfilled. Such instances demonstrate that individual women leaders have the potential to set benchmarks for accountability within governance structures.

The findings illustrate that women leaders in Ekurhuleni Municipality are generally viewed as promoters of accountability, with their contributions spanning transparency, responsiveness, and ethical governance. However, their impact is mediated by systemic challenges, societal biases, and the broader governance context. Addressing these barriers and enhancing women's representation in leadership roles could amplify their potential to foster accountability within governance structures.

### **Related Responses**

*Proactive and Effective Roles in Promoting Accountability (Participants 1, 3, 7, 10, 17)*

Several participants highlighted women's proactive and effective contributions to promoting accountability within governance structures. For instance, Participant 1 highlighted how women leaders navigate patriarchal biases to advocate strongly for transparency and ethical governance, demonstrating resilience and dedication in their roles. Similarly, Participant 3 noted the responsiveness of women leaders to social responsibility issues, describing them as proactive in addressing community needs and ensuring governance accountability.

Participant 7 affirmed the consistent demonstration of accountability by women leaders, citing their efforts to enhance transparency and meet community expectations. Participant 10 provided a concrete example of a former female mayor uncovering corruption and initiating self-audits, emphasising the transformative role that women leaders play in fostering accountability. Additionally, Participant 17 highlighted the

perception that women leaders act as checks against corruption, maintaining integrity and ensuring a culture of accountability.

### *Potential for Promoting Accountability When Given Opportunities (Participants 2, 5, 13, 15)*

Other responses emphasise the potential of women leaders to excel in accountability if granted equal opportunities. Participant 2 asserted that women leaders can significantly enhance governance effectiveness, emphasising the positive outcomes of including women in leadership roles. Participant 5 echoed this sentiment, suggesting that the absence of women in governance could hinder accountability, with their involvement seen as a potential solution to governance challenges.

Participant 13 affirmed that women leaders, when supported, are capable of enforcing accountability measures, further emphasising their active engagement in promoting transparency. Participant 15 added that young women leaders are particularly effective in fulfilling their responsibilities, demonstrating their capability to promote accountability within governance structures.

### *Nuanced Perspectives on Strengths and Barriers (Participants 9, 16, 18, 19)*

Several participants provided nuanced perspectives, acknowledging the strengths that women bring to accountability and the barriers that they face. Participant 9 recognised the significant efforts of women leaders to enhance transparency and ethical conduct while noting that gender may not be the sole determinant of leadership effectiveness. Participant 16 drew a parallel between women's caregiving roles and their approach to accountability, emphasising their inherent commitment to responsibility while acknowledging systemic challenges within governance structures.

Participant 18 highlighted the under-representation of women in key leadership positions, such as heads of departments, as a barrier to accountability. However, they also acknowledged that some women leaders exemplify

accountability, illustrating the variability in leadership outcomes. Participant 19 offered a broader view, suggesting that individual beliefs, political ideologies, and organisational affiliations influence women's promotion of accountability, rather than gender alone.

## Unrelated Responses

### *Critical and Divergent Perspectives (Participants 6, 14)*

Participant 14 presented a critical view, suggesting that women leaders might protect others, potentially undermining accountability. This perspective deviates from the broader consensus on women's positive contributions to governance accountability. Participant 6 focused on individual differences rather than gender, arguing that accountability is a systemic issue rather than being gender-specific, which also diverges from the specific inquiry into women's roles in governance structures. The summary is highlighted in the table below.

**Table 1:** Summary of whether women leaders increase accountability

| Participant number | Key Points                                                                                                |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1                  | Women advocate for accountability under pressure, but face challenges because of patriarchy.              |
| 2                  | Believes women can promote accountability if given leadership opportunities.                              |
| 3                  | Female colleagues are proactive and address issues quickly, especially in social responsibility.          |
| 4                  | Women leaders, like former mayor Tanya Campbell, are effective in delegating and ensuring accountability. |
| 5                  | Women make good leaders and can promote accountability, suggesting a lack of women is detrimental.        |
| 6                  | Accountability is an individual trait, not gender-specific.                                               |
| 7                  | Strong affirmation that women promote accountability.                                                     |

## African Women in Governance

| Participant number | Key Points                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8                  | Women contribute more to promoting accountability, possibly because of a personal bias as a woman.                                         |
| 9                  | Women promote accountability to a large extent, though attention to this may vary.                                                         |
| 10                 | Strong belief that women, with sharp scrutiny, are significant promoters of accountability, citing examples of anti-corruption efforts.    |
| 11                 | Believes men and women account for their actions, emphasising individual responsibility.                                                   |
| 12                 | Points to societal biases against women in leadership, affecting their perceived accountability                                            |
| 13                 | Women can promote accountability if given chances, and they actively push for it.                                                          |
| 14                 | Suggests that women may be less effective in accountability because of protective behaviours.                                              |
| 15                 | Women are effective in accountability because of their responsiveness and efficiency.                                                      |
| 16                 | Women have a strong sense of responsibility, likely influenced by their roles in raising children, promoting accountability in leadership. |
| 17                 | Women leaders keep male counterparts in check and are perceived as less corrupt.                                                           |
| 18                 | Mixed view; some women hold others accountable effectively, but structural challenges exist.                                               |
| 19                 | Accountability depends on political background and ideology rather than gender, noting accountable and non-accountable women leaders       |
| 20                 | Affirms that women promote accountability as part of their role                                                                            |

*Source: Shiviti (2024)*

The table reveals a generally positive view of women's roles in promoting accountability. Many participants highlight women's proactive and effective leadership styles, while a few point out that accountability is an individual trait influenced by structural and societal biases. Some emphasise the importance of giving women more opportunities to lead, suggesting that doing so could enhance accountability in governance.

### *Advocacy for Accountability*

Several participants highlighted the proactive role women leaders play in advocating for accountability, often against the backdrop of systemic patriarchal biases. Participant 1 noted that women leaders face immense pressure to prove their competence in governance structures but rise to the challenge by strongly advocating for ethical governance and transparency. This sentiment aligns with the broader view that women's leadership styles often emphasise integrity and social responsibility (Ngcamu, 2019b).

Moreover, Participant 7 stated that women leaders “consistently demonstrated a commitment to accountability,” citing their efforts to enhance transparency and responsiveness to community needs. This echoes the observations of Participant 10, who recounted a former female mayor's initiative to demand audits and address corruption proactively. These examples highlight the capacity of women leaders to foster accountability through direct and deliberate actions.

### *Intersection of Gender and Accountability*

The qualitative responses also reveal varying perceptions of the intersection between gender and accountability. Participant 16 suggested that women's caregiving roles, which emphasise instilling accountability in children, translate into their leadership styles, fostering openness and transparency. Conversely, Participant 19 emphasised that promoting accountability is not exclusively a gendered phenomenon but is influenced by individual beliefs, political ideologies, and organisational affiliations. This nuanced perspective suggests that while women leaders may bring unique attributes to governance, their ability to promote accountability is shaped by broader systemic and contextual factors (Skenjana et al., 2019a).

### *Challenges and Barriers*

Despite these positive perceptions, some respondents pointed to challenges that hinder the promotion of accountability by women leaders. Participant 12 highlighted societal biases

against women in leadership, noting that under-representation and systemic barriers persist within Ekurhuleni's governance structures. Similarly, Participant 18 attributed accountability deficits partly to the under-representation of women in key decision-making roles, such as heads of departments. These challenges suggest that while women leaders may promote accountability, their impact is often constrained by structural and cultural limitations (Corruption Watch, 2021b).

### **Varied Approaches and Perceptions**

The responses also indicate diverse approaches amongst women leaders in fostering accountability. Participant 17 noted that women leaders are perceived as effective at "keeping their male counterparts in check," suggesting that their presence acts as a counterbalance to unethical practices. On the other hand, Participant 14 argued that some women leaders might hinder accountability by being overly defensive or protective of certain individuals. These divergent perspectives highlight the complexity of leadership dynamics within Ekurhuleni Municipality and the need to evaluate leadership effectiveness on a case-by-case basis.

### **Discussion and Analysis of Findings**

The analysis reveals a prevailing view amongst respondents that women in political roles are often perceived to exhibit high levels of accountability. Many participants noted that women tend to be proactive, addressing issues promptly and engaging in social responsibilities (Participants 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 20). They are frequently viewed as diligent workers, often under considerable pressure to prove their capabilities within male-dominated environments (Participant 1). This drive for accountability is sometimes attributed to the persistent influence of patriarchy, which compels women to work harder to validate their worth. As a result, women are often seen as more accountable and thorough in their roles (Participants 1, 10, 16).



However, some respondents argue that accountability is not inherently tied to gender but is rather a product of individual traits such as personal integrity and political ideology (Participants 6, 14, 19). From this perspective, accountability is seen as an attribute linked to character and political culture, rather than gender-specific tendencies.

While many respondents acknowledge the positive attributes of women in leadership roles, several also point out the ongoing challenges that women face, such as societal biases and under-representation in key areas, which may limit their ability to fully exercise accountability (Participants 12, 18). These obstacles suggest that while women may excel in holding others accountable, systemic issues and patriarchal structures in male-dominated environments can undermine broader efforts towards accountability.

Illustrating the potential of women to lead with integrity and accountability, several respondents highlighted examples of women in Ekurhuleni, such as the previous mayor, who fought corruption and demanded transparency (Participants 4, 10, 17). These cases demonstrate the potential for women to lead with strong principles of accountability when provided with the opportunity.

In conclusion, the feedback suggests that women in political roles in Ekurhuleni are generally perceived as highly accountable, often working under increased scrutiny and pressure to prove their competence. However, the concept of accountability is recognised as an individual characteristic shaped by political and cultural contexts rather than being intrinsically linked to gender.

#### *Gender-Responsive Policies*

The implementation of gender-responsive policies, including gender quotas and affirmative action, is essential for increasing women's representation in decision-making roles. These policies contribute to a more balanced and diverse composition within political and institutional bodies, fostering comprehensive discussions and well-rounded policy solutions.

Gender quotas act as targeted interventions to dismantle systemic gender-based inequalities and promote women's inclusion. Furthermore, they serve as role models, inspiring future female leaders and shifting societal perceptions about women's capabilities in leadership. Gender-responsive policies challenge stereotypes, enhance democratic processes, and promote social cohesion by ensuring that all voices are considered, aligning with global gender equality frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### *Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Policies*

Comprehensive policies addressing sexual harassment and discrimination within political spheres are crucial for creating safer, more inclusive environments for women. These policies help to prevent harassment, protect legal rights, and ensure women's participation without fear of mistreatment. A culture of respect and dignity fosters collaboration and increases women's active participation in political processes. Robust policies not only prevent power imbalances and mental health impacts but also enhance the reputation of political institutions, attract diverse talent, and ensure compliance with legal standards. Education and awareness components further promote gender equality, changing societal norms and contributing to a fairer political system.

### *Accountability Mechanisms*

Strengthening accountability mechanisms within municipalities through transparency, regular audits, and clear consequences for unethical behaviour is essential for fostering public trust and effective governance. Independent bodies should be established to impartially investigate corruption or misconduct allegations, reinforcing fairness and credibility. Transparent financial practices and regular audits improve resource management, while a culture of ethical conduct is promoted through consistently enforced consequences for misconduct. Strengthened accountability mechanisms contribute to better service delivery, increased public confidence, and attract investment, while empowering civil society to actively engage

and hold officials accountable, ensuring compliance with legal and ethical standards.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter highlights the significant role that women in leadership positions play in promoting accountability within local governance, particularly in Ekurhuleni Municipality. Women leaders are widely perceived as highly accountable, often navigating heightened scrutiny to demonstrate their competence and effectiveness in decision-making roles. This perception is supported by the notion that women in leadership positions, facing the dual challenges of gendered expectations and systemic biases, work harder to establish credibility and prove their capabilities. The proactive approach taken by many female leaders reflects a commitment to transparency, efficiency, and social responsibility, contributing to the overall accountability of municipal governance. Their ability to balance social and institutional demands exemplifies their leadership and impact on policymaking processes, further reinforcing the importance of gender inclusion in political leadership.

However, the chapter also emphasises the complexity of accountability as a trait, recognising it as an individual characteristic that transcends gender. While women are often seen as exemplifying accountability, this attribute is also influenced by broader societal, political, and cultural contexts, which shape leadership behaviours and expectations. Accountability in leadership is not inherently linked to gender but is shaped by personal integrity, political ideology, and the specific challenges that leaders face within their respective environments. The findings suggest that fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in leadership roles is crucial for enhancing their effectiveness and ensuring that accountability remains a shared value across all leadership positions, irrespective of gender. The results of this chapter contribute to ongoing discussions on the intersectionality of gender, leadership, and accountability in local governance, highlighting the need for continued efforts to support women in leadership roles and address structural barriers to their success.

## References

- Adejumo–Ayibiowu, O. (2015). Feminist political economy: An African perspective. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 4(2), 45–60.
- Alexander, A., Charron, N. & Justesen, M.K. (2023a). Female representation and electoral clientelism: New insights from South African municipal elections. *Electoral Studies*, 82, 102580. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2023.10t2580>
- Alexander, A., Charron, N. & Justesen, M. (2023b). The role of women in promoting transparency in governance. *Journal of Political Studies*, 41(2), 123–140.
- Corruption Watch (2021a). *Corruption report: South Africa's municipalities under scrutiny*. Johannesburg: Corruption Watch.
- Corruption Watch. (2021b). *Annual report: Corruption trends in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Corruption Watch.
- Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs (COGTA). (1998). *White Paper on Local Government*. COGTA, 9 March 1998. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.cogta.gov.za/cgta\\_2016/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/whitepaper\\_on\\_Local-Gov\\_1998.pdf](https://www.cogta.gov.za/cgta_2016/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/whitepaper_on_Local-Gov_1998.pdf)
- Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA). (1997). *White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery*. DPSA, 18 September 1997. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.dpsa.gov.za/dpsa2g/documents/acts&regulations/frameworks/white-papers/transform.pdf>
- Eagly, A.H. (1987). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social role interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Elson, D. (2017). Recognizing women's unpaid work in the global economy. *International Labour Review*, 156(2), 147–160.
- Khupuza, N. (2021). Barriers to accountability in governance: A gendered perspective. *South African Journal of Political Studies*, 22(3), 45–60.
- Khupuza, T. (2021). *Evaluating the role of governance and leadership on service delivery: Case of Ekurhuleni municipality*. MBA Research Report. Midrand: Unisa Graduate School of Business Leadership.

- Klijn, E.H. & Koppenjan, J.F.M. (2012). Governance network theory: Past, present and future. *Policy and Politics*, 40(4), 587–606. <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557312X655431>
- Kraai, S., Ndevu, Z. & Matsiliza, N. (2023). Participatory budgeting to foster inclusivity, transparency, and accountability in local government: A case paper of the City of Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality of South Africa. *African Journal of Public Affairs*, 14(1), 63–88.
- Marumo, D. (2014). *Challenges faced by female councillors in Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality*. Doctoral dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Marumo, T. (2014). Women in leadership: A paradigm shift in governance. *Journal of Public Leadership*, 10(2), 100–115.
- Naidoo, C. & Ramphal, R.R. (2019). *From Batho Pele principles to public participation in basic services delivery at municipal level in South Africa: Using Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality as a case*. Proceedings of the 13th International Business Conference, 22–2
- Naidoo, P. (2017). Gender and accountability in local governance: Challenges and opportunities. *African Governance Review*, 15(4), 65–80.
- Naidoo, R. & Ramphal, R. (2019). The influence of women leaders on accountability in governance. *African Journal of Governance Studies*, 12(1), 56–78.
- Nel, J. & Jerome, T. (2022). Community-centric approaches to accountability in local governance. *South African Governance Review*, 10(3), 211–229.
- Ngcamu, B. S. (2019a). Accountability and governance failures in South African municipalities. *Journal of Public Administration*, 54(3), 419–437.
- Ngcamu, B. S. (2019b). The role of women in promoting ethical governance: Case studies from South African municipalities. *Journal of Public Administration*, 54(1), 34–45.
- Pierre, J. & Peters, B.G. (2020). *Governance, politics and the state*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

- Plaatjie, M. (2019). The role of corruption in undermining service delivery in South Africa. *African Journal of Governance*, 8(2), 87–102.
- Rai, S.M. & Waylen, G. (2014). *New frontiers in feminist political economy*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315884745>
- Republic of South Africa (RSA). (1996). *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/constitution-republic-south-africa-1996-04-feb-1997>
- Republic of South Africa (RSA). (1998). Local Government: Municipal Structures Act No. 117 of 1998. *Government Gazette*, No. 19614. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis\\_document/201409/a117-980.pdf](https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/a117-980.pdf)
- Republic of South Africa (RSA). (2004). Local Government: Municipal Property Rates Act No. 6 of 2004. *Government Gazette*, No. 26357. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.cogta.gov.za/cgta\\_2016/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/LG-Municipal-Property-Rates-Act-no.6-2004.pdf](https://www.cogta.gov.za/cgta_2016/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/LG-Municipal-Property-Rates-Act-no.6-2004.pdf)
- Ritzer, G. & Stepnisky, J. (2020). Feminist theory: Perspectives and debates. *Sociological Theory Today*, 8(1), 123–140.
- Schneider, D.J. & Bos, A.E. (2019). Gender role theory and the social construction of leadership. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 45, 289–310.
- Schneider, M.C. & Bos, A.L. (2019). The application of social role theory to the paper of gender in politics. *Political Psychology*, 40, 173–213. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12573>
- Shiviti, B. 2024. *The role of women as political actors in Ekurhuleni municipality: a feminist analysis of accountability*. Faculty of Humanity, University of Johannesburg.
- Sithole, P. & Mathonsi, M. (2015). Barriers to women's leadership in South African local governance. *African Leadership Journal*, 8(4), 34–48.
- Skenjana, A., Moloi, T. & Nkosi, V. (2019a). Gender and governance: Accountability frameworks in South African municipalities. *African Journal of Governance and Development*, 8(2), 21–37.

## Chapter Eleven

- Skenjana, L., Ngamlana, N., Mabhula, N. & Mgwebi, V. (2019b). The impact of corruption on marginalized communities in South Africa. *Development Studies Quarterly*, 12(1), 43–56.
- Skenjana, N., Ngamlana, N., Mabhula, T., Mgwebi, G., Sokupa, T. & Kimemia, P. (2019c). *Understanding the impact of corruption on service delivery in Local Government*. Cape Town: Good Governance Learning Network.
- Transparency International. (2017). *Corruption Perceptions Index 2016*. Transparency International. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/corruption-perceptions-index-2016>





## Chapter Twelve

# Gender and Age Demographics: The Qualitative Decline of the ANC

Vusi Gumbi 

*Institute for Pan African Thought and Conversation*  
*University of Johannesburg*   
*vusigumbi1704@gmail.com*

### Introduction

There is a universal, commonly held view in political discourse that democracy can only be achieved through the involvement of political parties because they are the building blocks of democratisation. Therefore, political parties must be understood within the overall theory and practice of democracy. Political parties have developed into an effective method for contesting power in democracies, in Africa and elsewhere. They are a crucial component for institutionalising, fostering, consolidating, and strengthening democracy (Shale, 2013).

However, there are two major flaws with African political parties – particularly the former liberation movements-turned government: first, political organisations that brought about political freedom and independence were typically led by men because of the patriarchal and cultural value systems. Second, because they were founded on the same European political culture, political parties mirrored the very colonial system that they were meant to replace (Shale, 2013). There is a familiar pattern of entrenched patriarchy and ageism with former liberation movements in government. These movements fought against the destructiveness of colonialisation. Now, they have become hostage to their own success as liberation movements. It is very hard for liberation movements male leaders to recognise that women and young people could have any equivalent right

to lead, while for them, their record in the struggle confers a virtually permanent claim on power.

The dream of promoting and protecting civil freedoms that had been suppressed by the colonialists, was put on hold even though independence came with the expectation of doing so. Former liberation movements have kept maintained the discrimination of women and young people in political leadership, and the African National Congress (ANC) is no exception. Through a qualitative approach, the chapter investigates how South Africa's ruling ANC, as a result of patriarchy and ageism, has failed to evolve, and similarly failed to arrest its declining electoral support.

The aim of the chapter is to illustrate how the inability of the ANC to allow time and space for women to lead; as well as paving the way for the next generation of leaders of the movement, has led to its decline. While efforts have been made to promote gender balance in leadership positions. Achieving full gender equality remains an ongoing challenge that requires continued commitment and effort from the ANC and South African society.

Accordingly, through a consideration of the 31 years that have passed since the advent of democracy and 32 years since the ANC's first conference in the country after its unbanning and the current relationship between the ruling party and the representation of women and young people in its leadership, this article aims to locate the present state of the country's ruling party and its declining hegemony, through an exploration of the lack of women and young people in positions of responsibility in the party. The ANC has been swamped by many challenges ranging from lack of political consciousness, careerism, ostentatious behaviour and factional tendencies. While the decline of the party cannot be attributed to two things, the atrophied state of the party, and specifically its patriarchy and ageism has been a contributing factor.

## Conceptual Consideration

The theory of gender equality and intergenerational mix in political leadership encompasses the idea that diverse representation in political leadership, in terms of gender and age, can positively affect governance and decision-making. This theory is rooted in the belief that a more inclusive and balanced political leadership can better address the complex and evolving needs of society. This section looks at Gender Equality in Political Leadership and Intergenerational Mix in Political Leadership – as the theoretical lenses of this chapter.

### Gender Equality in Political Leadership:

Achieving sustainable development and egalitarian societies requires women to participate equally in politics. While there has been some progress in the fight to end the under-representation of women in leadership roles, it has been inconsistent and gradual. Gender equality in political leadership aims to ensure that men and women have equal opportunities to participate in and influence political processes. The theory behind this concept suggests several benefits which diverse perspectives – this is because when it comes to political leadership positions, men and women frequently bring distinct life experiences, points of view, and goals. A more balanced representation of the two genders can result in more thorough and well-rounded policymaking (Elias & Musi, 2022). This has a ripple effect on better policy results – improved social, economic, and political outcomes can be attained by gender-inclusive leadership, which produces policies that are more attentive to the needs and concerns of the entire population (Nwankor, 2022). Furthermore, enhanced democracy – leadership that is gender-balanced works to advance democratic principles by guaranteeing that all citizens are equally represented and have a voice in decision-making (Nwankor, 2022). Inspiring future generations of women to pursue political professions and dismantling conventional gender stereotypes is the role-modelling power of women in leadership positions. Increasing women's participation in public life strengthens a country's democracy, economy and long-term peace and stability.

**Intergenerational Mix in Political Leadership:**

For political systems to be representative, all parts of society must be included. When young people are disenfranchised or disengaged from political processes, a significant portion of the population has little or no voice or influence in decisions that affect group members' lives. A key consequence is the undermining of political systems' representativeness. The concept of intergenerational mix in political leadership emphasises the importance of having a variety of age groups represented in government.

This perspective is based on the belief that a mix of younger and older leaders can lead to fresh perspectives – younger leaders often bring new ideas, technological expertise, and a forward-looking approach to governance, which can be valuable in addressing contemporary challenges. This finds credence in, for example, the African Union's Agenda 2063 (AU, 2013). Youth participation in formal political processes and a voice in shaping today's and tomorrow's politics are crucial if they are to have an impact over the long run. Not only is inclusive political involvement a fundamental political and democratic right, but it is also essential for creating stable, peaceful societies and formulating laws that cater to the particular demands of younger generations. In order for young people to be fairly represented in political institutions, processes, and decision-making, especially during elections, they must be aware of their rights and provided the skills and resources needed to engage meaningfully at all levels. With the active participation of young people, democratic principles can come to life and authoritarian practices can be overthrown. If they are not involved in new formal decision-making processes, young people in nations where they have led protests that have ousted authoritarian administrations are likely to experience tremendous frustration. Democratisation may become unstable as a result, and conflict dynamics may accelerate.

In practice, achieving gender equality and an intergenerational mix in political leadership can be challenging because of existing power structures, biases, and societal norms.

However, many countries and organisations have taken steps to promote these principles through policies like gender quotas, youth representation initiatives, and mentorship programmes. The goal is to create more inclusive and responsive political systems that better serve the needs of diverse populations and promote sustainable governance.

### **The ANC and Women's Participation and Representation in Leadership**

The ANC's fundamental objective goal has been to bring about the National Democratic Society (NDS), which it describes as being brought about by overcoming the three antagonistic contradictions of class, race, and patriarchal relationships that are interconnected. The ANC asserts that this goal will be accomplished through a National Democratic Revolution (NDR) (ANC, 2007).

As Africa's oldest liberation movement, the 110-year-old organisation has never been led by a woman. This is a reflection of an organisation, together with its rank and card-carrying members, that does not believe that there has ever been an astute woman (or women) to lead the movement. Rosho (2022) argues that the women and the struggle for liberation are inextricably linked, and therefore none can exist in the absence of the other, including the 1965 resistance when more than 20,000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest against the pass laws (Rosho, 2022).

It is well documented that John Langalibalele Dube was the founding president of the ANC, however, it was Nokutela Dube, his wife, who co-founded the Ohlange Institute: established for Africans and saw leaders such as Albert Luthuli – who would be the future President of the ANC and Africa's first Peace Prize Laureate – educated there (The Presidency, 2017). As Gabaitse and Kumalo (2014) express, she became the embodiment of the first generation of African women who championed women's struggle against all forms of oppression.

The ANC of Lillian Ngoyi, Albertina Sisulu, Winnie Mandela and many others provide us examples of how women

have historically been at the centre of revolutions. When liberation movements were banned, their leaders jailed and exiled, Winnie Mandela kept the fires burning; Albertina Sisulu played a key role in United Democratic Front and Charlotte Maxeke, the first black woman to obtain a degree, formed the Bantu Women's League (SA History Online, 2011) (predecessor of the ANC Women's League) when the South African Native National Congress (predecessor to the ANC) would not allow female members.

Over the years, however, the ANC has not created a political environment where women are given the responsibility to lead the organisation, this despite it having some of the most prominent and generally accepted women leaders in society within its ranks. Women in the ANC have not been viewed as intellectuals, theorists or nationalists, despite having shaped the history of the movement. They have continuously been reduced to figureheads such as 'Mother of the Nation' or 'Mother of the Liberation Struggle'. Women in the ANC have been left out of history's hall of fame, despite their tremendous contributions to some of the events that have helped shape our lives.

There is no denying that the ANC has worked to emancipate women and continues to be the leader in society in the promotion of non-racism and non-sexism – since this is the case, it is neither feasible nor desirable to draw broad conclusions regarding its progress or lack thereof – the bone of contention, rather, is that in contrast to its goals and objectives, its leadership has been male-oriented.

While the ANC has made significant contributions to the transformation of South Africa on many fronts and while its National Executive Committee (NEC) has made a conscious effort to put in place measures to ensure that women have access to actual power, it has so far failed in according its women cadres' positions of responsibility in the party. The fact that the party signed the 2008 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (SADC, 2021) is insufficient if it does not create practical pathways for women to hold leadership positions in the party.

Interesting developments have been taking place in the area of the struggle for women's emancipation within the ANC since the beginning of 1990. The ANC Women's League (ANCWL) proposed that 30% of the ANC NEC be women but that was rejected by the 48<sup>th</sup> National Conference in 1991 (Knapp, 2015). All the women's organisations in the country were persuaded by the ANC Women's League to form an alliance – the mission of this alliance would be to conduct research, coordinate efforts, and draft a women's charter based on the objectives and issues that matter most to women across the nation (SA History Online, 2011). Early in 1991, the National Women's Coalition (NWC) was established, and work on the Women's Charter began right away. As a result, significant appointments of women to the government coincided with the establishment of democracy in 1994. This was the result of the effective advocacy of women who were organised during the transition under the guidance of the NWC (Kedijang, 2018).

The ANC adopted a 50/50 gender parity policy on all of its structures at its 52<sup>nd</sup> National Conference in Polokwane in 2007 (Martens, 2012). There is no doubt that gender quotas have contributed significantly to the rise of women in the ANC NEC. The standing of women in the broader structures of the party has not dramatically improved despite this. In the provinces, regions, and branches, men still make up the large majority of elected officials and to this day, the late Edna Molewa remains the only woman to have been elected provincial Chairperson (North West) and currently only Zandile Gumede leads a region (eThekweni).

This is because gender parity only deals with issues of gender politics at a procedural and policy level. It does not address the substantive equality that remain absent in leadership positions within the party. It doesn't matter whether there are 60 females in ANC's 80-member NEC if, collectively, they don't yield as much influence as the 20 male members. To state the obvious, this isn't merely a numbers game, it's about creating real change about how women are viewed in the ANC and the influence that they hold.

### **The Top 6 Debate – Now Top 7**

The top 7, formerly the top 6, are the most powerful positions in the ruling ANC – which comprise the president, deputy president, national chairperson, secretary general, two deputy secretary generals (the second deputy secretary general was added after the 2022 National Conference) and the treasurer-general. These are the national office bearers of the ANC.

Formerly ‘unprepared for a black President’, South Africa eventually elected Nelson Mandela as its first, and the result was stability for the ANC and the nation as a whole. No woman has ever been elected president or deputy president of the ANC in its 110-year history. Interestingly, sometimes even women themselves have doubts about a woman being president today: the ANC Women’s League once said that South Africa was not ready for a female President, “We want to have a female president in the near future. We are just not prepared for it now. We do not have capable leaders” (Seale, 2013). It is of paramount importance for the ANC to destroy the deeply ingrained patriarchy, particularly the role of men in the ANC, because it is threatening the culture, values, and future of this once glorious movement.

“Democracy and genuine humanism, according to Lenin, is equality. At the age of 18, Adelaide Frances Tambo was the chairperson of the ANC’s George Goch branch and, guess what, Oliver Tambo was an ordinary branch member. He was led by a woman, but history is always written by winners — men” (Mdekazi, 2017).

Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, the party has held seven elective conferences: the conferences of 1994, 1997 and 2002 saw only one woman elected into the top 6 – Cheryl Carolus, Thenjiwe Mtintso and Sankie Mthembi-Mahanyele respectively (all three occupied the position of Deputy Secretary General – henceforth DSG) – “it seems like the position of deputy secretary-general was created for women” (Tau, 2022).

In order for Jacob Zuma to be elected party deputy president without opposition in 1997, the ANC’s NEC asked Winnie Mandela to decline nomination from the conference



floor; Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma was reduced to nothing more than being the ex-wife of outgoing party leader when she contested for the position of party leader in 2017; and despite having served as the United Nations' Under Secretary General for Women and previously as deputy president of the Republic, Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka has never been voted into the top 6 (7) in the party.

This phenomenon has found expression in slate politics that date back to 2007 when Thabo Mbeki, who wanted to bring an end to the tradition that automatically renders the leader of the ANC the president of the state, by contesting for a third term as party leader. But the conference in Polokwane was more than a contest between Zuma and Mbeki. It was about one faction of the ANC overthrowing another and seizing control. This gave rise to slate politics – always led by men and women included to ensure some kind of gender representation. This also highlights the fact that the women running on these slates were not really in positions of influence or authority.

The 2007 elective conference saw two women in the top 6 for the first time with Baleka Mbete elected National Chairperson, the most senior position to be held by a woman in the ANC to date; and Thandi Modise elected DSG. Baleka Mbete was re-elected five years later and Jessie Duarte replaced Thandi Modise as DSG. Five years ago, Jessie Duarte was re-elected into her position (the only woman to be elected into the top 6 at the 54<sup>th</sup> National Conference) – a position she held until she succumbed to cancer on 17 July 2022. Although the 2022 conference saw the inclusion of three women into the national leadership of the ANC, it was at the behest of a top 6 changed into a top 7. Why this is not a step towards mainstreaming gender parity amongst the national officials of the ANC is that the president, deputy president, chairperson and secretary general positions are all occupied by men. Therefore, the three women who occupy the positions of first and second deputy secretary general as well as treasurer were nothing more than a tick box exercise for men that chose them as running mates for the respective slates.

### **Politically Senior: Women Are Ahead of the Men**

“We are the backbone of this movement. We are the women who have carried the man on our shoulders through the years for them to succeed in the struggle”

– Adelaide Tambo at the  
ANC’s 48th National Conference, 1991

The anomaly here is that unlike their male counterparts, women in the ANC have risen through government and party structures – whereas male leaders have risen to their cabinet posts through party ranks, and not both. This means that women in the ANC generally have more experience than men in the party.

With the exception of Thabo Mbeki – who did play a larger role as Nelson Mandela delegated to him policy-related responsibilities, while he attended to projecting the new republic’s global image (Peter, 1999) – the position of deputy president, which in three of the last four administrations has essentially served as a president-in-waiting, has offered very little opportunity for policy involvement.

Mbeki’s successor, Jacob Zuma served as Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Economic Affairs and Tourism for KwaZulu-Natal from 1994 to 1999. And the highlight of his six-year tenure as State Deputy President was being a facilitator of the Burundi Peace Process (Curtis, 2017). Cyril Ramaphosa, who was deputy president at the time, similarly devoted much time facilitating peace in the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho (The Presidency, 2015). While it might ensure South Africa’s role as the ‘Big Brother’ in efforts to bring about peace and other continental challenges, as well as familiarise themselves with the international community for when they assume the presidency (while not negating the basic truth that SA will bear the brunt of instability in its neighbouring countries), it must also be acknowledged that experience in domestic policy, whose primary duties are management and direct administration, cannot be replaced by credentials in international policy because national interests start domestically.

To what extent does a head of state rely on assurances given to him by members of his cabinet? How can a president hold people accountable if he is not acutely aware of what a ministerial job entails because he has never been one? The fundamental issue facing the ANC and, by extension, South Africa, is that since 1994, none of the presidents have had a ministerial role (and do not know what policy implementation on the ground looks like), instead rising through the customarily dual party-government position of deputy president (Ndzendze, 2022).

On the other hand, women have had extensive experience within the ANC and in government. Take for instance, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, who has served under all the Presidents since the democratic dispensation of 1994: Minister of Health (under Nelson Mandela), Minister of Foreign Affairs (under Thabo Mbeki and Kgalema Motlanthe), Minister of Home Affairs (Under Jacob Zuma) and Minister in the Presidency and later Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Under Cyril Ramaphosa). Before being appointed into Ramaphosa's cabinet, she served as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chairperson of the African Union Commission – the first woman to lead the continental organisation or its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) (DIRCO, 2012).

Dr Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka was a member of the first South African democratically elected Parliament in 1994 – chairing the portfolio committee on Public Service and was the deputy minister in the Department of Trade and Industry. The election of Thabo Mbeki as Mandela's successor saw her appointed as minister of Minerals and Energy. She later became the Deputy President of South Africa (2005 – 2008), the highest-ranking female political leader in the history of the country (ACCORD, 2020). In 2013, she was appointed by the then UN chief, Ban Ki-Moon as the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women – a position she held for two terms, until 2021 (UN Women, 2021).

Elsewhere on the African continent, women have shown what great leaders they can become. One of the most

outstanding examples of peacebuilding in Africa in has come from the women of the Mano River in West Africa. When Ruth Perry, a prominent member of the Liberia Women Initiative, was chosen to oversee a transitional team of truculent warlords in September 1996, subsequently becoming Africa's first female head of state (Massaquoi, 2007). She contributed to the end of a battle that had carried on for seven years and during which 13 peace deals had been ruled null and void because of her vigour, skill, and respect. Ellen John Sirleaf, the first democratically elected woman President in Africa, ushered Liberia through a peaceful transition of power, ended a civil war and dispelled the notion that her country is a poster boy for destruction – earning her a Noble Peace Prize in the process.

Similarly, in January 1996 a determined women's movement in Sierra Leone helped push a military junta out of power, paving the way for the 11-year-old democratic rule of Ahmed Tejan Kabbah (Bangalie, 2011). Women's groups in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea have been a catalyst for change – irreplaceable in their ability to lead with distinction especially when it is was not fashionable nor conducive to do so – including the likes of Guinea's Sarah Daraba Kaba – who co-ordinated peacemaking efforts in a bid to calm the troubled waters of Mano River.

These are female politicians and leaders who are more experienced than their male colleagues. Maybe the question we should be asking is: Who is more qualified than the other?

### **Ageism and Lack of Succession Plan**

“A country, a movement, a person that does not value its youth & children doesn't deserve its future”

– ANC Longtime President, Oliver Tambo

Young people have been the driving force behind every significant turning point in South Africa and in the ANC, the one organisation that has been a part of the country's dynamic journey for more than a century. Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter Anton Lembede, and Robert Sobukwe were amongst the

most notable ANC figures to emerge from the Youth League (YL) during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and came to dominate the fight for liberation (Redding, 2015).

The young leaders of the 1944 generation burst through the gates, motivated by their youthful idealism and impatience against the oppression of black people and senior leaders of the movement who appeared to be locked in a 'gradual' fight for liberation. Young people were prepared to give their lives in order to radicalise their thinking and intellect and develop fresh strategies for fighting for the freedom of the people. They wanted to take over the mother body and chart a way forward in the relentless fight for self-determination – and succeeded in doing so (Diko, 2022).

Leaders like Steve Biko and Rick Turner, who inspired millions of young people to participate actively in the Durban strikes of 1973 and the 1976 student uprising, which brought about the changes that finally led to South Africa's liberation, followed in the 1970s. The Soweto uprising in 1976 and the 1980s street struggles that made South Africa ungovernable to a point of no return bring to mind images of youth as the driving force behind activism and political change.

This brings me to the second point – the absence of young people in leadership positions within the ruling party. The late Peter Mokaba, arguably the most prominent ANC Youth League leader, had never been elected into the top six of the ANC. Malusi Gigaba, once touted as future party leader, was never elevated within party structures, until his unceremonious departure from government and Fikile Mbalula led an unsuccessful bid to become Secretary General in 2012 – all three are former leaders of the ANC Youth League. Others such as Fébé Potgieter-Gqubule and Rapu Molekane have also been overlooked. Today, all six national officials of the ANC are in their 60s and their average age is 64, with party leader, Cyril Ramaphosa – who's likely to be re-elected at the party's 55<sup>th</sup> National Conference – turning 70 later this year. *"Peter Mobaka waited to be the one of the officials of the ANC...comrade Fikile Mbalula waited, comrade Malusi Gigaba waited...we are also told that we must wait in this que.*

*It means that we are going to wait forever because all those that came before us are still waiting in that que and there is no hope that they will one day make it to the other line*” lamented Ronald Lamola (39) at an ANC rally in Mpumalanga in 2022 – Lamola, who had been touted as the potential deputy president, did not make it into the national officials of the ANC in the 2022 Conference.

Former leaders of the ANC YL have not played a role in the succession of the ANC. The ruling party does not have a succession plan as most of the senior leaders have been there since the 1991 conference – and therefore there has never been a new generation of leaders in the party. The role of the youth has proven to be of particular importance in democracies around the world particularly in South Africa as a fledgling democracy. There is a dire need for the development of young people into astute leaders who can carry the banner of the ANC forward.

The youth of its leaders has always been advantageous to the ANC. Only Nelson Mandela (‘Madiba’), who was 70 years old at the time, assumed leadership of the ANC late in his life – and that can’t be divorced from his 27 years in prison. Nevertheless, Mandela’s government was amongst the youngest the nation had ever seen because Madiba himself had valued the wit of his own youth of the 1944 generation and entrusted much of his work to his young deputy and cabinet.

Lembede, Sisulu, Tambo, Mandela, Majombozi, Mda, Nkomo, Nokwe, and many other young leaders who were not just Youth Leaguers but were young leaders driven by a sense of destiny and urgency to lead the entire ANC and country at a time when elders had become more conservative with age were necessary for the ANC to survive at that time. They changed the course of history forever and out of them, came out a globally revered icon.

This is no different to the generation of young people that followed – Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, Chris Hani, Thandi Modise, Ayanda Dlodlo, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula and others who came into the organisation to lead it into greater frontiers and new waves of battle. If today’s ANC is to revive and thrive, young people must take over the reins.

When compared to the second and third biggest political parties in the country, the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), the ANC is nowhere close to gender equality and intergenerational mix: Helen Zille, now Federal Chair of the DA, had two terms as party leader and was first elected when she was 56 years old and the youngest member amongst the national officials of the DA is 35 years old, Ashor Sarupen; the EFF has a three-a-side with three men and three women in its top six, with party leader, Julius Malema (former leader of the ANC Youth League) 41 years old.

## **Conclusion**

Since the ANC has an internal patriarchal culture of patronage and ageism, women and young people have a hard time climbing the ranks of the party. The dawn of democracy has seen older men refusing to vacate and usher in a new generation of leaders, because for them, the ANC is now a vehicle through which state resources are obtained to enrich themselves – and the now defunct Women's League and Youth League have not been able to make serious advancements for women and young people to be represented and supported throughout the different tiers of the party. With women only propelled to leading positions because of gender parity policies on provincial top positions, it can easily lead to women becoming mere proxies for men. After all, representation is not only a numbers game. Therefore, gender equality and intergenerational mix policies for the upper tiers of national and provincial leadership are a great achievement but mean little in context of intra-party politics that remain firmly in male hands.

As a result of its entrenched patriarchy and ageism, the party has declined and has been haemorrhaging electoral support for many years. These two factors have made it impossible for the ANC to be a vibrant institution through which there is an emergence of a leadership that is intellectually astute, morally above reproach and professionally grounded, with a thorough grasp of governance. The only way that the ANC can reclaim its hegemony in society is by becoming an organisation that best reflects the dreams and aspirations and

the age and gender demographics of the society it claims to best represent. This can only be achieved when the party, through an intergenerational mix and women's empowerment in positions of responsibility.

Once hailed for its role in the struggle for liberation and best representing the dreams and aspirations of society, now has patriarchy and ageism rearing their ugly heads, making it difficult for the party to evolve, arrest the declining electoral support and adapt to the changing dynamics of the country. If the ANC is to reclaim its place in South Africa as a vehicle for social transformation, it cannot ignore the gender and age demographics any longer.

## References

- ACCORD. (2020). *Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka: United Nations Under Secretary General and Executive Director for UN Women*. UN Women. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/directorate/former-executive-director-phumzile-mlambo-ngcuka> [Accessed: 23 August 2022].
- African National Congress (ANC). (2007). *52nd National General Council: Adopted Strategy and Tactics of the ANC*. ANC. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.anc1912.org.za/adopted-strategy-and-tactics-of-the-anc/> [Accessed: 17 August 2022].
- African Union (AU). (2013). *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. AU. [Online]. Available at: <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>
- Bangalie, F. (2011). *An Examination of the Role of Women in Conflict Management: Sierra Leone a Case Chapter*. Master's Dissertation, University of Malta.
- Curtis, D. (2017). South Africa's peacemaking efforts in Africa: Ideas, interests and influence. In: Adebajo, A. (ed.) *Foreign policy in post-apartheid South Africa: Security, diplomacy and trade*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350986480.ch-002>



## Chapter Twelve

- Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). (2012). *Minister Dlamini Zuma Officially Recognised as New Chairperson of the AU Commission*. DIRCO. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2012/au0717.html>.
- Diko, Y. (2022). *ANC at a Crossroad – it is Time to Pass the Baton to Young People*. EWN. [Online]. Available at: <https://ewn.co.za/0001/01/01/yonela-diko-anc-at-a-crossroad-it-is-time-to-pass-the-baton-to-young-people> [Accessed: 28 August 2022].
- Elias, M. & Mussi, D. (2022). Political leadership and gender (in) equality. In: Farazmand, A. (ed.) *Global encyclopedia of public administration, public policy, and governance*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Cham: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66252-3\\_2819](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66252-3_2819)
- Gabaitse, R. & Kumalo, S. (2014). Singing from the grave: Nokuthula Linderely Dube returned to memory. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 40(2).
- Kedijang, K. (2018). *Beyond 50/50 Representation: A Call for a Feminist Government*. Soul City Institute for Social Justice. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.soulcity.org.za/news-events/news/beyond-50-50-representation-a-call-for-a-feminist-government> [Accessed: 7 August 2022].
- Knapp, M. (2015). *The ANC Women's League in the Struggle for Women's Rights in South Africa*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/anc-womens-league-struggle-womens-rights-south-africa-meghan-knapp> [Accessed: 30 July 2022].
- Martens, T. (2012). *The Women's Liberation Struggle*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.anc1912.org.za/articles-2012-the-womens-liberation-struggle/> [Accessed: 7 August 2022].
- Massaquoi, W. (2007). *Women and Post-conflict Development: A Case Chapter on Liberia*. Master's dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Mdekazi, M. (2018). *ANC Men Must Toss Patriarchy and Accept that Women Can Lead*. Mail & Guardian, 28 March 2017. [Online]. Available at: <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-03-28-anc-men-must-toss-patriarchy-and-accept-that-women-can-lead/> [Accessed: 4 August 2022].

- Ndzendze, B. (2022). *Previous Experience Required – Every South African President and Deputy President Should Also be a Cabinet Minister*. Daily Maverick, 17 March 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-03-17-previous-experience-required-every-south-african-president-and-deputy-president-should-also-be-a-cabinet-minister/> [Accessed: 7 August 2022].
- Nwankwor, C. (2022). Priorities for advancing women's equal political leadership in the coming year. Brookings, 23 February 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/priorities-for-advancing-womens-equal-political-leadership-in-the-coming-year/> [Accessed: 12 August 2022].
- Peter, J. (1999). *Mbeki Takes Over From 'Saintly' Mandela*. *The Washington Post*. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/s\\_africa/stories/mbeki061799.htm](https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/s_africa/stories/mbeki061799.htm) [Accessed: 2 August 2022].
- Redding, S. (2015). The ANC Youth League by Clive Glaser. *Cambridge University Press, African Studies Review*, 58(3). <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2015.101>
- Rosho, M. (2022). *In Celebrating its 110 Year Anniversary the ANC Must Know the Struggle is Not Complete Without the Emancipation of Women*. Mail & Guardian, 8 January 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://mg.co.za/thought-leader/opinion/2022-01-08-in-celebrating-its-110-year-anniversary-the-anc-must-the-struggle-is-not-complete-without-the-emancipation-of-women/> [Accessed: 7 August 2022].
- Seale, L. (2013). *SA not ready for female president – ANCWL*. IOL. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/sa-not-ready-for-female-president-ancwl-1589121> [Accessed: 24 September 2023].
- Shale, V. (2016). Gender equality and women's empowerment through political parties: Africa's record in democracy-building. *Conflict Trends*, 3(2013), 44–49.
- SA History Online. (2011). *History of Women's Struggle in South Africa*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/history-womens-struggle-south-africa#contents-9> [Accessed: 30 July 2022].

## Chapter Twelve

- Southern African Development Community (SADC). (2021). *SADC Protocol on Gender and Development*. SADC. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-08/Protocol\\_on\\_Gender\\_and\\_Development\\_2008.pdf](https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-08/Protocol_on_Gender_and_Development_2008.pdf)
- Tau, R. (2022). *It's time the ANC Elected a Woman as Deputy President*. Daily Maverick, 13 February 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2022-02-13-its-time-the-anc-elected-a-woman-as-deputy-president/> [Accessed: 7 August 2022].
- The Presidency. (2015). *SADC Renews Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa's Mandate to Facilitate Peace in Lesotho*. The Presidency, 5 July 2015. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/content/sadc-renews-deputy-president-cyril-ramaphosa%E2%80%99s-mandate-facilitate-peace-lesotho?\\_\\_escaped\\_fragment\\_\\_=slider&page=10#!slide](https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/content/sadc-renews-deputy-president-cyril-ramaphosa%E2%80%99s-mandate-facilitate-peace-lesotho?__escaped_fragment__=slider&page=10#!slide) [Accessed: 17 August 2022].
- The Presidency. (2017). *Ms Nokutela Dube (Posthumous): National Order*. The Presidency. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/ms-nokutela-dube-posthumous-0> [Accessed: 27 July 2022].
- UN Women. (2021). *Former Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2013-2021*. UN Women. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/directorate/former-executive-director-phumzile-mlambo-ngcuka> [Accessed: 27 August 2022].





## Chapter Thirteen

# Gender Dimensions of COVID-19 and Social Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa

**Cecy Edijala Balogun** 

*Centre for the Study of Race, Gender and Class  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa  
olusanjo2017@yahoo.com*

**Omosefe Oyekanmi** 

*Institute for Pan African Thoughts and Conversation  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa  
afefekudu@yahoo.com*

### Introduction

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is highly gendered and social policy measures that were implemented to mitigate the impact of the disease on the lives and livelihood of the affected population in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) reveal a gendered approach by governments in SSA. Since its outbreak in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has undergone several phases, with cases rising sporadically in some countries compared to others. At the global level, COVID-19 cases rose from over 79 million in 2020 to over 500 million as of 2022, and reported deaths rose from over 1 million in 2020 to more than 6 million as of May 2022 (OWD, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health concern, it affected all areas of human life globally. In particular, the pandemic outbreak has amplified the pre-existing vulnerabilities and structural inequalities that exist in SSA, where most of the world's vulnerable to socio-economic shocks live.

As a way of curbing the spread of the disease, several policies were implemented, including the closure of borders, imposition of lockdown and movement restrictions, closure of public places, and places of means of livelihood at national and global levels. These measures, to safeguard public health, exposed people to other dimensions of distress, with implications for their sustenance. Empirical evidence has shown that although the impact of the pandemic is widely felt across nations and by different population groups, men and women are differently affected by the disease outbreak. While gender inequality has persisted in SSA, from the family settings to the workplace, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated such inequalities. The pandemic outbreak and the containment measures disproportionately affect women's and men's access to healthcare and health services, and livelihood opportunities. Gender-based violence also increased following the lockdown because of the movement restrictions that narrowed the space between women and their abusers in the case of intimate partner and close relative violence and increased cases of non-intimate violence reported in several countries in SSA. Women in displaced people's camps also suffered the impact of the vagaries of the pandemic compared to men.

Social policy measures that were implemented in SSA in response to the pandemic outbreak have also been found to be gendered. Whether policy measures on social protection, labour markets, gender-based violence, or other forms of measures meant to reduce the socio-economic shocks of the pandemic, women were found to have less access to such opportunities than men.

The chapter, therefore, analyses the gendered dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the social policy measures that were implemented to address the socio-economic impact of the pandemic in SSA, by addressing three main objectives. (1) to analyse the pandemic outbreak in SSA (2) to analyse the gender dimensions of the pandemic impact in SSA (3) to analyse the social policy responses to the pandemic outbreak in SSA. It argues that the impact of the pandemic is highly gendered

in SSA, as men and women are differently affected by the pandemic and policy responses of the governments are also gendered, with limited considerations to women's pre-existing vulnerabilities that are exacerbated by the pandemic.

The chapter uses secondary data sourced from the Africa Centre for Disease Control (Africa CDC), Our World in Data (OWD) on the prevalence and trends of COVID-19, International Labour Organization (ILO) data on social protection, and the United Nations Development programme (UNDP) Global Gender Response Tracker and International Monetary Fund (IMF) datasets. Countries with high incidences of confirmed cases and deaths in SSA are examined in the chapter. The generated data from the various sources are analysed using charts and tables to explain the dynamics of the prevalence and trends of the COVID-19 pandemic, the dimensions of social protection explored in SSA, and a gendered perspective of social protection in SSA in response to the pandemic outbreak. Articles, publications, and Internet materials are also used in the discourse. An empirical analysis of the gendered impact of the pandemic in SSA is imperative for ensuring that efforts that are geared towards mitigating the impact of the disease, especially in post-COVID-19 policies should address the gender gaps in social policy responses to affected households or individuals. The chapter provides evidence for policymakers and concerned institutions in SSA to enhance the selection of options to address the COVID-19 pandemic impact from a gendered perspective.

The rest of the chapter is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on a contextual discussion of COVID-19 in SSA, including the prevalence, trend, and containment policies of governments; the second section analyses the gender dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic; the third section analyses the policy responses to mitigate the impact of the pandemic by governments in SSA, and the fourth section concludes the chapter with recommendations.

## **Contextual discourse of COVID-19 in SSA**

The COVID-19 pandemic, which was first reported in China in 2019, was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020 (WHO, 2020). The first reported case of COVID-19 in Africa was in Algeria, on 25 February 2020, and in the sub-Saharan African region, Nigeria reported the first case on 27 February 2020 (Impouma, et al., 2021). Since the first outbreak of the pandemic in SSA, the trends and prevalence of the disease have undergone various phases, with the global, regional, and national governments responding through a series of policy measures to contain its spread and impact on people.

### **Prevalence and Trends of COVID-19 in SSA**

The prevalence and trends of the COVID-19 pandemic differ across countries and continents since its first outbreak in 2020. As of 7 June 2022, over 11 million confirmed cases, and more than 250 thousand deaths have been recorded on the African continent (African Centre for Disease Control, 2022).

In SSA, Southern Africa has the highest number of confirmed cases on the continent, with over 5 million confirmed cases, with the lowest number of reported confirmed cases in Central Africa, where less than 4 hundred thousand confirmed cases have been reported (Figure 1). Reported cases on a per-country basis indicate that South Africa has the highest number of cases, with about 4 million confirmed cases as of 7 June 2022 (African Centre for Disease Control, year).



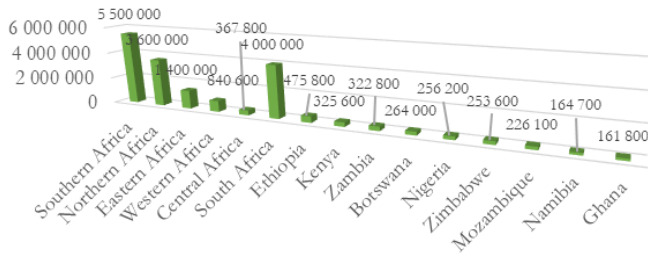


**Figure 1:** Prevalence of COVID-19 in Africa as of 7 June 2022.  
Source: Researcher's computation from Africa CDC (2022) dataset

The trends of the disease outbreak also show an increase since 2020 when the disease first broke out. For instance, in South Africa, while the number of confirmed cases was over 1 million by 31 December 2020, as of 31 May 2022, about 4 million cases of the disease had been confirmed (Table 1). Similarly in Ethiopia, with the second highest number of cases in SSA, confirmed cases increased from about 120 thousand by 31 December, to almost 500 thousand as of 31 May 2022 (Table 1). In West Africa, Nigeria had the highest number of confirmed cases of the disease, and even though this may be low compared to South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya, Zambia, and Botswana (Figure 1), there had also been a steady increase in confirmed cases, increasing from over 87 thousand by 31 December 2020 to over 250 thousand by 31 May 2022 (Table 1).

Similarly, as observed globally, deaths associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have been on the increase in SSA. Higher death rates are reported in South Africa compared to other countries on the continent. The death rate in South Africa increased from about 28 thousand in 2020 to over 100 thousand as of 31 May 2022 (Figure 2). Comparatively, reported death rates in other countries in the sub-region have been low. For example, even though Ethiopia has the second highest number of confirmed cases, after South Africa, only about 7 thousand deaths have been reported as of 31 May 2022, while in Nigeria, recorded deaths are as low as about 3 thousand for the period under analysis (Figure 2).

**Table 1:** Trends of COVID-19 in selected countries in SSA

| Global/Region/Country | Confirmed cases |             |             | Deaths    |           |           |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                       | 2020*           | 2021*       | 2022**      | 2020*     | 2021*     | 2022**    |
| World                 | 83,748,179      | 288,694,522 | 529,705,596 | 1,880,470 | 5,440,227 | 6,292,532 |
| Africa                | 2,760,454       | 9,756,168   | 11,884,875  | 65,468    | 228,453   | 254,076   |
| South Africa          | 1,057,161       | 3,458,286   | 3,957,777   | 28,469    | 91,145    | 101,190   |
| Ethiopia              | 124,264         | 420,342     | 472,743     | 1,923     | 6,937     | 7,513     |
| Kenya                 | 96,458          | 295,028     | 324,976     | 1,670     | 5,378     | 5,651     |
| Nigeria               | 87,607          | 241,513     | 256,028     | 1,289     | 3,030     | 3,143     |

Source: Researcher's computation from Our World in Data database

\*2020 and 2021 data are figures as of 31 December; \*\*2022 data are figures as of 31 May 2022

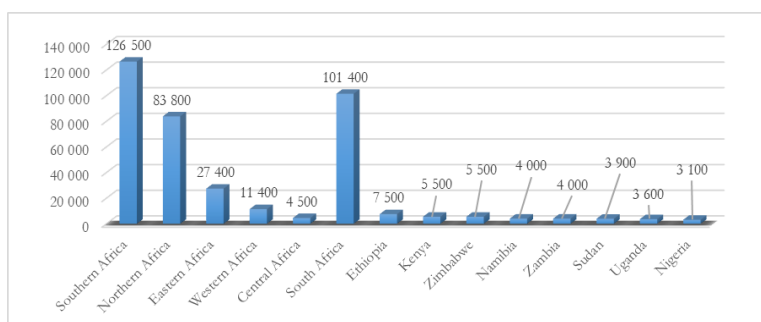


**Figure 2:** Sub-regional/country recorded death from COVID-19 in Africa as of 7 June 2022. Source: Researcher's computation from Africa CDC (2022) dataset

### ***Containment Policy Measures of COVID-19 in SSA***

Given the pandemic nature of COVID-19, the need for prompt policy responses in containing its spread and impact on population groups locally, nationally, and globally were explored. From the closure of national and international borders, and closure of public places, including worship centres, business places, tourism sites, schools, worship centres, etc., to restrictions of movements, imposition of curfews, and compulsory COVID-19 testing to contain the disease, were implemented in SSA, in line with global practices (IMF, 2022). The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in 2021 has also been a key driver towards containing the spread of the disease and reducing fatalities.

While the containment measures that were imposed at the early stages of the pandemic, particularly in 2020 were understandably necessary for safeguarding public health, they also reinforced another challenge to society. The variants of lockdown and movement restriction policies that were implemented at global, regional, and national levels, affected all segments of society, to varying degrees. Primarily, means of livelihood, access to socio-economic resources, and distress mechanisms for people that are prone to violence and other attacks were seriously affected by such measures. These measures aggravated the gender gaps already evident in their

limited sensitivity to gender differences in their implementation (ILO, 2022b). Women are differently affected by the pandemic than men (ILO, 2020). Hence, where policy measures of containment and management of the impact of the disease are not sensitive to gender differences in impact, a new problem could arise, with implications for bridging the gender gap in society.

Firstly, the closure of public places and movement restrictions affect women and men differently. Even though the pandemic is a health concern, during the lockdown, women experienced challenges attending to other health needs, because the attention of most governments was tailored towards the pandemic than addressing other health challenges. There was a disruption in the women's access to routine healthcare, especially maternal care as a result of the pandemic, as most governments' attention was focused on the pandemic at the expense of other health needs of women (Aranda et al., 2020).

Secondly, the border closure that was imposed by several countries greatly affected women who derive their livelihood from cross-border trade, since the measure prevented them from accessing their means of livelihood (Zarrilli & Linoci, 2020).

Thirdly, the lockdown and closure of public places, including places where women derive their means of livelihood diminished their income, and livelihood opportunities. Hence, while the policy measures that were imposed to contain the spread of the disease appeared laudable, understanding how they contribute to gender gaps in SSA is key to situating post-COVID-19 recovery policies that will enhance gender equality in society.

### **Gender Dimensions of COVID-19 in SSA**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is highly gendered. On almost all fronts of life choices, women are at a disadvantage compared to men, even before the outbreak of the disease. The structural failures of most governments in SSA are evident in the high levels of poverty, unemployment, poor health

outcomes, and other socio-economic deprivations. The United Nations (UN) noted that women aged 25–34 are 25% more likely than men to live in extreme poverty (UN, 2020). This is expected when critical indicators of standards of living are considered, such as healthcare and employment, since pieces of evidence show that gender gaps exist in women's access to these life opportunities. It is to the extent that they can access these opportunities that the potential or actual impact of the pandemic on their lives and livelihood is understood.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2020) noted that the impact of the pandemic on victims and survivors of domestic violence, homeless women, older women, and women and girls with disabilities differ and that women who are deprived of their liberty, displaced, refugees, migrants, and those living in areas that are affected by conflict are more at risk of the vagaries of the disease. This series of impacts on women is not exhaustive; however, this section will focus on the impact of the pandemic on women's access to healthcare, their livelihood opportunities, and gender-based violence.

### ***Access to Healthcare***

The impact of the pandemic on access to healthcare and services is gendered globally, with similar experiences observed in SSA. Primarily, women's engagement in the health sector predisposes them to the disease, given that most of the people employed in the sector are women. They constitute about 70% of the health sector workers, working as nurses, midwives, community health workers, caterers, cleaners, and launderers (UN, 2020). This suggests a likelihood of their higher exposure to the disease and its impacts than men.

Apart from their direct involvement in the health workforce, women's needs for healthcare vary from that of men, especially in areas of reproductive health. Hence, the diversion of resources from primary health concerns to address the emergent COVID-19 pandemic puts women's health at further risk of the disease contagion and other associated impacts. The UN Women (2020) reported that an extended lockdown for six

months could deny about 47 million women in 114 low- and middle-income countries access to modern contraceptives. In Nigeria, there was a 50% drop in anti-natal visits in the early stages of the pandemic and a 40% decrease in available skilled birth attendants (Ameyaw et al., 2021). This means that women with maternal care issues during the peak period could be exposed to other threats when the available personnel or service required are not readily available as a result of the pandemic.

Women's access to healthcare as a result of the pandemic is also a function of the government's spending in the health sector in SSA. The expenditure for the health sector has been persistently low for most countries in SSA, ranging from 9.3% in Malawi, 8.2% in South Africa, on the high side to as low as 3.9% and 3.2% in Nigeria and Ethiopia respectively in 2018 (UNDP, 2020). With such low commitment to the health sector, the preparedness for eventualities like the COVID-19 pandemic and the emergency required to curtail the spread of the disease implied neglect of other health needs of the populace, especially women's health concerns.

Conclusively, the gendered dimension of access to healthcare was relatively poor in some countries in SSA, and while the health expenditure is generally low, its effect on women's healthcare, particularly on the ANC during the pandemic, was far-reaching.

### **Livelihood Opportunities**

The livelihood of households was seriously affected by the pandemic, especially because of the lockdown and closure of places of livelihood opportunities that were adopted globally to manage the spread of the pandemic. The impact of the pandemic spreads across almost all sectors of socio-economic means of livelihood, with a gendered dimension to the impact on livelihood.

### **Labour Force Participation**

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, gaps exist in labour force participation globally and in SSA. According to the UNDP (2020),

a gender gap exists in the participation in the labour force globally, reporting a 94% participation of men between the ages of 25 and 54 in the labour force compared to 63% of women. In SSA, while the female labour force participation in countries like Ethiopia, Kenya, and Malawi has been persistently high over the last decade, as high as 70% in 2019, for countries like Nigeria and South Africa, the female labour force participation was 47.87% and 49.61% respectively in 2019 (UNDP, 2020). In contrast, the male labour force for Nigeria and South Africa in 2019 was 57.9% and 62.7% respectively in 2019 (ibid). With the pandemic, fewer women became employed in Malawi, Nigeria, Uganda, and Ethiopia, which was more pronounced in Uganda and Ethiopia where more women than males lost their jobs as a consequence of COVID-19 (Weber et al., 2020). This implies that with the lockdown and associated containment measures, the impact of the disease on women's participation will be further reduced. Hence, with women disproportionately more in the informal sector and giving more hours than men to unpaid work at home, their access to livelihood opportunities is largely distorted by the pandemic.

### **Informal Employment**

The informal sector accounts for the majority of the labour force globally, also, reflecting a gendered situation. An estimated 740 million women work in the informal sector globally (ibid), dominating the sector, with an estimated 42% of women employed in the sector compared to 32% of men (ILO, 2020). The informal sector is reported to be the most affected by the pandemic (Nguimkeu & Okou, 2020). In Nigeria, more than 90% of women work in the informal sector, and with the imposition of the lockdown, the livelihoods of such women are automatically affected for the period of the lockdown (Nguimkeu & Okou, 2020).

The services sector remains a key employer of most people in the informal sector. In countries like South Africa, Nigeria, and Ghana, there is a high proportion of people employed in the services sector. The UNDP (2020) data showed that in South Africa and Nigeria, for example, 72.4% and 52.0% of the total

population are employed in the services sector respectively. The services sector is also dominated by women, accounting for 84% and 63.57% in South Africa and Nigeria in 2019 respectively (UNDP, 2020). Their higher rates of employment in the services sector also confirm the likely differential in the impact of the pandemic on women's livelihood. The containment measures that prevented them from accessing their livelihood during the peak periods of the lockdown in SSA, put their livelihood survival and that of their dependents at risk.

Remuneration is an essential motivation for services rendered or jobs performed. The gender gap that existed before the outbreak of the pandemic also implies that women may earn less for alternative means of livelihood to cushion the impact of the pandemic in the face of the lockdown and closures of their primary places of livelihood. The gender pay gap implies that women are generally paid less for similar services rendered. According to the UN (2020), the gender pay gap is about 16%, with women paid about 35% less than men in some countries. As in the case of Uganda, Ethiopia, Malawi, Nigeria (Weber et al., 2020), and some other SSA countries, alternative means of livelihood paid women less than men during the outbreak of the pandemic. This means that women's ability to cope with family needs during the COVID-19 lockdown period dwindled compared to men.

### **Gender-Based Violence**

Gender-based violence was tagged "the shadow pandemic" by the UN (2020) following its growing prevalence as a result of the pandemic and the lockdown that predisposes victims to their abusers. UNODC (2020:2) reported that housing individuals or families in proxy for an extended period increased the rate of violence against women. The movement restrictions and enforced 'stay at home' measures led to situations of crowded homes, substance abuse, limited access to services, and reduced peer support, situations that expose women from abusive families trapped with their abusers (Dempster et al., 2020).



Instances of gender-based violence were reported in several parts of SSA during the lockdown. The UN (2020:8) reported that the disruptions to health care services were also predicted to contribute to an additional 7 million unintended pregnancies, including those emanating from rape cases. In a similar report, the UNDP (2020) indicates that 38.8% of women in Ethiopia and 35% in Liberia experienced physical or sexual violence in a twelve-month period. Though the report for Nigeria is as low as 11% (UNDP, 2020), apart from sexual and physical abuse during the lockdown, instances of young women who were sexually abused and killed by the perpetrators during the lockdown were widely reported in Nigeria. In another report, the UN Women (2020) reported that gender-based violence cases increased from 314 in March to 781 in April 2020 alone, in Nigeria.

## **Social Policy Responses to the Impact of COVID-19 in SSA**

Broad policy measures that are used globally in addressing societal needs range from policies that address labour markets, economic, financial, and fiscal support for businesses and entrepreneurs, social protection, and violence against women (UNDP, 2020). In response to the pandemic, governments in SSA responded to the pandemic outbreak using similar measures to address the health impact of the pandemic and mitigate the impact on the livelihood and welfare of various segments of society. Some of the measures that were announced include special allowances or grants, food and nutrition protection, and health protection, with several covering various measures including housing or basic services benefits, income or job protection. Selected country situations of policy measures to combat the pandemic in SSA are highlighted.

### **Policy Responses in Selected Countries in SSA**

The response to COVID-19 was complex and ongoing on a worldwide scale. International efforts to battle the epidemic were effectively coordinated and facilitated by the UN and

the WHO. National and regional governments, as well as international institutions, received directives from the UN and WHO. This was essential in order to effectively combat the epidemic, as the UN and WHO highlighted the need for worldwide cooperation and solidarity. To stop the spread of the virus, numerous nations and organisations worked together on research, data sharing, and resource allocation, by guaranteeing equitable access to vaccinations, diagnostics, and treatments, the WHO collaborated on the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator with organisations including the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (Gavi) and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI). The COVAX effort, sponsored by Gavi, the WHO, and the CEPI, sought to give COVID-19 vaccines fair and equitable access, particularly to low- and middle-income countries.

Beyond the global response to COVID-19, state or country responses were significant to mitigating the spread and impact of the pandemic on people. Below are some policy responses from selected countries.

As part of the multi-sectoral policy response to the pandemic in Ethiopia, an estimated \$635 million (0.6% of the country's GDP – gross domestic product) was allocated to food distribution to 15 million people that are vulnerable to food insecurity who are not covered by the rural and urban Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNPs) (IMF, 2022). An additional \$293 million (0.3% of GDP) was allocated to the agricultural sector support, nutrition, protection of vulnerable groups, etc. (IMF, 2022). An exemption from personal income tax withholding for four months was allowed for firms that continue to pay employees' salaries during the lockdown (IMF, 2022). This measure further enhances the social security of employees in the country. Following the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine in 2021, Ethiopia received 2.2 million vaccine doses in March 2021, with a target of vaccinating 20% of the population by the end of 2021 (IMF, 2022). However, as of 14 June 2022, only 0.3% of the more than 120 million people in the country have been fully vaccinated (African Centre for Disease Control, 2022).

In response to the pandemic, the government of Kenya budgeted Ksh40 billion (0.4% of GDP) for COVID-19-related expenditures, including the health sector, social protection (including cash transfers and food reliefs), and funds to maintain cash flow for businesses (IMF, 2022). In the 2021 budget cycle, the government also released a Ksh56.6% million (0.5% of GDP) economic stimulus package that covers a new youth employment scheme, provision of credit guarantees, increased funding for cash transfers, etc (IMF, 2022). Tax relief for persons earning below the equivalent of \$225 per month, reduction of VAT from 30% to 25%, reduction of corporate income tax from 30% to 25%, etc., and in the 2022 budget, an additional Ksh45 billion (0.4% of GDP) was also allocated to cover amongst other, vaccines, access to affordable healthcare, economic stimulus programme for vulnerable groups (IMF, 2022). The vaccination plan in Kenya was initially targeted at vaccinating 30% of the population by mid-2023 (IMF, 2022), however, as of 14 June 2022, only 3.7% of the over 56 million people in the country have been fully vaccinated (African Centre for Disease Control, 2022).

One of the first responses of the Nigerian government following the outbreak of the pandemic was a ₦500 billion (0.3% of GDP) COVID-19 intervention fund, which covered health expenditures (including tests, supplies, and facilities) and a public works programme to support vulnerable households (IMF, 2022). The social register of poor and vulnerable households was also increased by 1 million, from the initial 2.6 million beneficiaries to 3.6 million households (IMF, 2022). Also, the Central Bank of Nigeria provided ₦73.7 billion (\$139 million) in targeted credit facilities to support households and small- and medium-scale enterprises (IMF, 2022). The Nigerian vaccine policy was initially planned to vaccinate 40% of the population in 2021 and an additional 30% in 2022 (IMF, 2022), however, this is far from reality, because as of 14 June 2022, only 9.8% of the over 200 million people in Nigeria have been fully vaccinated (African Centre for Disease Control, 2022).

The South African government provided funding from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) to assist companies and

workers up to April 2021 in response to the pandemic outbreak (IMF, 2022). Funds were also made available for the health sector, workers with an income below a certain threshold were given tax subsidies for four months, and the most vulnerable families were given temporary higher social grants (IMF, 2022). A temporary COVID-19 grant was also provided to cover unemployed workers who were not covered in the UIF benefits, food parcels distributed and funds allocated for public works programmes, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) under stress, small-scale farmers in the poultry, livestock and vegetable sectors, etc. (IMF, 2022). The South African government planned a strategic vaccination that targeted 67% of the population by the end of 2021 (IMF, 2022). However, as of 14 June 2022, only 1.6% of the over 60 million people in the country have been fully vaccinated (African Centre for Disease, 2022). Be that as it may, some government responses have been instrumental in managing the impact on well-being and livelihood. Nigeria became the first African nation to sequence the SARS-CoV-2 genome on March 4, and as of July 1, South Africa was rated 19<sup>th</sup> globally, thereby leading the continent in testing per capita with 27,485 tests per million people (Travaly & Mare, 2020). A National COVID-19 Modelling Consortium was proactively established by the South African government to serve as the main repository for all COVID-19-related projections.

### **Dimensions of Social Protection Policies in Response to COVID-19 in SSA**

Beyond the general policies that were implemented to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on citizens in SSA, social protection has been recognised as a means of reducing the impact or effect of socio-economic shocks on poor and vulnerable households. Social protection measures are categorised based on their functions to include measures to improve health, children and family welfare, maternity services for women, unemployment, work injury, disability, old age, contribution to pension, and vulnerability (ILO, 2022a). In response to the outbreak of the pandemic, the UN (UN, 2021) reported that 51 out of 55 African countries announced a total of 227 social protection measures

between February and November 2020, which undoubtedly span the critical periods or the first phase of the disease outbreak in most countries in SSA.

Bearing in mind that women, who have more difficulty accessing public services, including health, education, and justice, are more vulnerable to violence and gender-based violence; and are poorer and more likely to experience poverty and health problems, they are considered a vulnerable group (UNDP, 2014). Hence, available data showed that the vulnerable in South Africa enjoy more social protection benefits compared to other countries in the sub-region (UNDP, 2020). In South Africa, the proportion of the population that enjoys at least one social protection benefit increased from 47.8% in 2016 to 49.3% in 2020 (UNDP, 2020), whereas in Nigeria, the proportion of people with at least one social protection benefit increased from 4.4% in 2016 to 11% in 2020 (UNDP, 2020). This is very low in a country where over 40.1% of the population is poor (NBS, 2023), with more people becoming vulnerable to poverty outcomes caused by the pandemic and lockdown measures. What is observable in Ethiopia is a decrease in the proportion of people with at least one social protection benefit (from 11.6% in 2016 to 7.4% in 2020), even though the country has the second-highest cases in SSA and the possibility of increased vulnerability. The diversion of funds to strengthen health systems, at the expense of the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, implies poor socio-economic outcomes for the poor and those who became vulnerable because of the lockdown.

An analysis of the coverage of social protection policies of some countries in SSA showed that most countries have not performed well in their coverage of the social protection measures. For instance, the proportion of the population with social protection coverage for maternity, which is an exclusive terrain for women, indicates that, except for Kenya and Botswana, with 30.2% and 24% coverage respectively, limited coverage was observed for countries like South Africa (7.6%), Zambia (4.1%) and Nigeria (0.1%) (ILO, 2022). For countries with high incidences of the pandemic, only South Africa and Zambia appear to have a reasonable social protection coverage

(32.4%) and (19.8%) respectively for vulnerable households, and for Nigeria, this is as low as 1.8% (ILO, 2022). The data also showed that only South Africa (11.9%) and Nigeria (7.0%) have social protection policies that cover unemployment (ILO, 2022). This is still very low, given the lockdown impact on the livelihood of households during the peak periods of the outbreak when people could not access their means of livelihood.

The low spending on social protection in SSA confirms the low coverage of social protection efforts. The ILO (ILO, 2022) data indicates that the expenditure on social protection as a percentage of the GDP is low for most of the countries, as low as 0.7% in Nigeria and 0.9% in Ethiopia, with South Africa having the highest, 5.5% of the GDP amongst the countries studied. The willingness or unwillingness to spend on social security measures is a determinant of how the pandemic will affect the lives and livelihood of citizens, especially the vulnerable like women.

Not minding the fact that several social protection policies were implemented in response to the pandemic outbreak in SSA, most of these policies are ad hoc responses that are not entrenched in the legal systems of the countries. Hence, their sustainability cannot be guaranteed beyond the critical phases of the pandemic outbreak. For instance, it is surprising that only South Africa has a social protection legislature that covers unemployment (40.2%) (Figure 3). The absence of such legislature in the select countries implies limited accountability of the government to the plight of those in vulnerable employment and those whose employment status became vulnerable as a result of the pandemic.

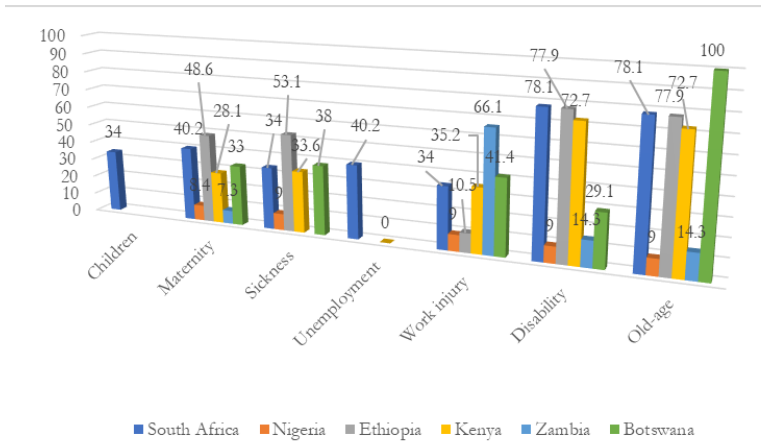


**Figure 3:** Legal coverage of social protection. Source: Researcher's computation from ILO (2022) dataset

### Gender Dimensions of Social Protection in SSA

Given that the impact of the pandemic on different population groups is gendered, any policy measure that is implemented should be gender-sensitive its effectiveness to be ascertained. While this is the expectation, observations from SSA indicate that social protection measures that were implemented to mitigate the impact of the pandemic are limited in gender-sensitivity.

Available data on the gender-sensitivity of social policy measures in SSA indicates that South Africa announced a total of 44 policy measures in 2020, with 17 addressed to social protection. Of the 44 policy measures, only 16 them are gender-sensitive (Table 2). Nigeria announced 34 policy measures with only 11 addressed to social protection. Of the 34 measures, only 13 are gender-sensitive (Table 2). Countries like Zambia and Botswana, with high incidences of confirmed cases and death rates, announced very low social protection measures – six and three respectively, with only four of their measures being gender-sensitive (Table 2).

It is also interesting to note that only South Africa announced four policy measures that directly support unpaid

**Table 2:** COVID-19 Policy Measures and Gender Sensitivity in SSA

| Country      | Types of policy measures |                        |               |                                                                          | Total number of policy measures | Addresses VAWG | Targets women's economic security | Directly supports unpaid care | Gender-sensitive |
|--------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
|              | Social protection        | Violence against women | Labour market | Economic, financial, and fiscal support for businesses and entrepreneurs |                                 |                |                                   |                               |                  |
| South Africa | 17                       | 7                      | 2             | 18                                                                       | 44                              | 7              | 5                                 | 4                             | 16               |
| Ethiopia     | 9                        | 7                      | 3             | 3                                                                        | 22                              | 7              | 5                                 | 0                             | 12               |
| Nigeria      | 11                       | 5                      | 2             | 16                                                                       | 34                              | 5              | 8                                 | 0                             | 13               |
| Kenya        | 12                       | 4                      | 6             | 6                                                                        | 28                              | 4              | 6                                 | 0                             | 10               |
| Zimbabwe     | 10                       | 8                      | 8             | 0                                                                        | 26                              | 8              | 4                                 | 0                             | 12               |
| Botswana     | 6                        | 2                      | 2             | 4                                                                        | 14                              | 2              | 2                                 | 0                             | 4                |
| Zambia       | 3                        | 3                      | 4             | 0                                                                        | 10                              | 3              | 1                                 | 0                             | 4                |

Source: Computed by the researchers from UNDP (2020) global gender response tracker



**Table 3:** Legal Coverage of Social Protection by Sex

| Country      | Children/<br>family |     | Mater-<br>nity |      | Sickness |      | Unemploy-<br>ment |      | Work injury |      | Disability |      | Old age |      |
|--------------|---------------------|-----|----------------|------|----------|------|-------------------|------|-------------|------|------------|------|---------|------|
|              | F                   | M   | F              | M    | F        | M    | F                 | M    | F           | M    | F          | M    | F       | M    |
| South Africa | 100                 | 100 | 30.2           | 30.2 | 30.2     | 37.9 | 34.6              | 46.2 |             |      | 77.3       | 79   | 77.3    | 79   |
| Nigeria      |                     |     | 8.4            |      |          | 12.3 | -                 | -    |             | 12.3 |            | 12.3 |         | 12.3 |
| Ethiopia     |                     |     | 48.6           |      | 48.6     | 57.7 | -                 | -    | 7.7         | 13.3 | 71.4       | 84.5 | 71.4    | 84.5 |
| Kenya        |                     |     | 28.1           |      | 27       | 40.3 | -                 | -    | 28.1        | 42.5 | 70.1       | 75.4 | 70.1    | 75.4 |
| Zambia       |                     |     | 7.3            |      | -        | 9.3  | -                 | -    |             |      | 7.3        | 21.6 | 7.3     | 21.6 |
| Botswana     |                     |     | 33             |      | 33       | 43.6 | -                 | -    | 35.4        | 48.1 | 28.5       | 6.6  | 100     | 6.6  |

Source: Researchers' computations using data from the ILO (2020) World Social Protection Database.

care amongst the countries under examination (Table 2). With the lockdown and the responsibility of attending to family members, and other basic chores, women's responsibilities increased compared to men (Augustus, 2021).

A major determinant of the commitment of governments to implement any policy measure is whether such measure is backed by the legislature. Disaggregating the legal coverage of social protection policies that are implemented along gender lines, it is interesting to note that only South Africa has a legislature that is truly gender-blind for children and family, with a legal backing of the policy altogether absent in other countries under examination (Table 3). Also, across all functions of social protection, gender bias exists, with women lagging in the legal coverage across the functions (Table 3). This situation is critical for the effectiveness of social protection measures as the absence of legislation that protects the rights of women to benefits to the same extent as men, further exacerbates their vulnerabilities.

Policy measures that were implemented by the governments in the region also reveal that most of the social policies are not gender-sensitive. Given that women are differently impacted by the pandemic than men, the chapter, therefore recommends the following:

1. The differential impact of the pandemic on women and men should be considered by governments in SSA when formulating and implementing social policies, especially social protection policies that target the poor and vulnerable in the society, and ensure that women are adequately incorporated into social policies.
2. It is imperative for governments in SSA to increase legislation that ensures equal access to social protection measures for men and women. This is critical given the lopsided distribution of social policy measures, as the absence of legislation limits governments' commitments to the implementation of social protection measures.
3. Targeted approaches that deliberately incorporate social policy policies into the working processes of governments

in SSA should be considered to be well-prepared to address unexpected emergencies.

## Conclusion

While the COVID-19 pandemic in SSA is highly gendered, policy responses of the governments in the region reveal limited sensitivity to the gender dimensions that are evident in the impact of the disease. As observed globally, the number of confirmed cases and deaths caused by the pandemic outbreak in SSA has been on the increase since the first reported case in the region in 2020.

In line with global containment measures, policy measures that are implemented like lockdown, movement restrictions, and closure of places of livelihood, reveal that apart from the health impact of the pandemic, other dimensions of vulnerabilities are also observed. The impact of the disease affected women's access to healthcare and employment opportunities more than men, and there were also increased cases of gender-based violence as a result of the lockdown in several countries in SSA.

## References

- African Centre for Disease Control (CDC). (2022). *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)*. Africa CDC. [Online]. Available at: <https://africacdc.org/covid-19/#>
- Ameyaw, E.K., Opoku Ahinkorah, B., Seidu, A.A. & Njue, C. (2021). Impact of COVID-19 on maternal healthcare in Africa and the way forward. *Archives of Public Health*, 79(1), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13690-021-00746-6>
- Aranda, Z., Binde, T., Tashman, K., Tadikonda, A., Mawindo, B., Maweu, D., Boley, E.J. et al. (2022). Disruptions in maternal health service use during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020: Experiences from 37 health facilities in low-income and middle-income countries. *BMJ Global Health*, 7(1), e007247. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2021-007247>

- Augustus, J. (2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women working in higher education. *Frontiers in Education*, 6(2021), 648365. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2021.648365>
- Dempster, H., Ginn, T., Graham, J., Guerrero, M., Jayasinghe, D. & Shorey, B. (2020). *Locked Down and Left Behind: The Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees' Economic Inclusion*. Center for Global Development. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/locked-down-and-left-behind-chapter-71320.pdf> [Accessed: 8 January 2025].
- Impouma, B., Mboussou, F., Farham, B., Wolfe, C. M., Johnson, K., Clary, C., ... & Moeti, M. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic in the WHO African region: the first year (February 2020 to February 2021). *Epidemiology & Infection*, 149, e263. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0950268821002429>
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2020). *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work*. Third edition. Updated estimates and analysis. ILO. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_743146.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743146.pdf) [Accessed: 8 January 2025].
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2022a). *Social Protection Monitor*. ILO. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/ShowWiki.action?id=3426> [Accessed: 8 January 2025].
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2022b). *World Social Protection Report 2020-22*. ILO. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.ilo.org/publications/flagship-reports/world-social-protection-report-2020-22-social-protection-crossroads-%E2%80%93> [Accessed: 8 January 2025].
- International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2022). *Policy Responses to COVID-19*. IMF. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19> [Accessed: 8 January 2025].
- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). (2023). *Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria: Executive Summary*. NBS. [Online]. Available at: [www.nigerianstat.gov.ng](http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng) [Accessed: 8 January 2025].

## Chapter Thirteen

- Nguimkeu, B.Y.P. & Okou, C. (2020). *A Tale of Africa Today: Balancing the Lives and Livelihoods of Informal Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. World Bank. [Online]. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/e71579db-b9d1-5f52-bdd5-e8c8ec0b16f7/content> [Accessed: 8 January 2025].
- Our World in Data (OWD). (2022). *Estimated cumulative excess deaths per 100,000 people during COVID-19*. OWD. [Online]. Available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/excess-deaths-cumulative-per-100k-economist>
- Travalay, Y. & Mare, A. (2020). *Learning from the best: Evaluating Africa's COVID-19 responses*. Brookings, 8 July 2020. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/07/08/learning-from-the-best-evaluating-africas-covid-19-responses/> [Accessed: 8 January 2025].
- United Nations (UN). (2020). *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*. UN. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/report/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en-1.pdf> [Accessed: 8 January 2025].
- United Nations Women (UN Women). (2020). *Gender-based violence in Nigeria during the COVID-19 crisis: The shadow pandemic*. UN. [Online]. Available at: [https://nigeria.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Gender%20Based%20Violence%20in%20Nigeria%20During%20COVID%2019%20Crisis\\_The%20Shadow%20Pandemic.pdf](https://nigeria.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Gender%20Based%20Violence%20in%20Nigeria%20During%20COVID%2019%20Crisis_The%20Shadow%20Pandemic.pdf) [Accessed: 8 January 2025].
- United Nations (UN). (2021). *Social policy and social protection measures to build Africa better post-COVID-19*. Policy Brief 93. UN. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/03/PB\\_93.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/03/PB_93.pdf) [Accessed: 8 January 2025].
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2014). *Rights: Vulnerable Groups of Women and Girls, Cambodia Gender Assessment*. UNDP Policy Brief 9. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/kh/Neary-Rattanak-4---Vulnerable-Groups-of-Women-and-Girls\\_Eng.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/kh/Neary-Rattanak-4---Vulnerable-Groups-of-Women-and-Girls_Eng.pdf) [Accessed: 8 January 2025].

- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2020). *COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker*. UNDP. [Online]. Available at: <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/> [Accessed: 8 January 2025].
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2020). *Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) response – UNODC Thematic Brief on gender-based violence against women and girls*. UNODC. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.unodc.org/documents/Gender/Thematic\\_Gender\\_Briefs\\_English/GBVAW\\_and\\_UNODC\\_in\\_COVID19\\_final\\_7Apr2020.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/Gender/Thematic_Gender_Briefs_English/GBVAW_and_UNODC_in_COVID19_final_7Apr2020.pdf) [Accessed: 8 January 2025].
- Weber, M., Palacios-Lopez, A. & Contreras-Gonzalez, I.M. (2020). *Labor market impacts of COVID-19 in four African countries*. World Bank blogs.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2020). *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)*. [Online]. Available at: [www.who.int/doc/default-source/coronavirus/situation-reports/20201005-weekly-epi-update-8.pdf](http://www.who.int/doc/default-source/coronavirus/situation-reports/20201005-weekly-epi-update-8.pdf)
- Zarrilli, S. & Linoci, M. (2020). *What Future for Women Small-Scale and Informal Cross-Border Traders When Borders Close*. *Gender and Development Programme*, UNCTAD.



# Conclusion

## Reflections on African Women in Governance

**Tinuade Adekunbi Ojo** 

*Centre for the Study of Race Gender and Class &  
Institute for Pan African Thoughts and Conversation  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa*

**Omosefe Oyekanmi** 

*Institute for Pan African Thoughts and Conversation  
University of Johannesburg   
Johannesburg, South Africa*

### Introduction

The conclusion of this book, *African Women in Governance*, serves as a reflective synthesis of the key insights and themes explored throughout the chapters.

The introduction highlighted the critical role of women's equal participation in governance as a cornerstone of democratic and sustainable societies. The subsequent chapters demonstrated that, while significant progress has been made in increasing women's political representation in countries such as Rwanda, Kenya, and South Africa, gender disparities persist across the continent. The factors inhibiting women's full participation in governance – including patriarchal norms, lack of political will, and barriers within electoral frameworks – highlight the need for comprehensive and sustained efforts to achieve gender parity. The diverse perspectives presented in the book reveal that policies and stakeholder participation play key roles in advancing women's representation in governance. The

implementation of affirmative action policies and gender quotas has led to gradual increases in women's political representation. However, these measures must be complemented by broader societal changes and targeted interventions to address deeply ingrained gender biases and structural barriers.

Despite the strides made, women in many African countries continue to face systemic challenges that hinder their full integration into political leadership. Socio-cultural attitudes and the persistence of traditional gender roles often limit women's political aspirations and opportunities. Additionally, the lack of access to resources, education, and networks further exacerbates the under-representation of women in governance. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach that includes education reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and the promotion of gender-sensitive political environments.

The book also sheds light on the importance of women's leadership in shaping inclusive policies and promoting social equity. Women's perspectives in governance have led to more comprehensive and equitable policy outcomes, particularly in areas such as health, education, and social welfare. By advocating for the rights and needs of marginalised groups, women leaders play a crucial role in advancing democratic governance and sustainable development.

Moreover, the chapters emphasise the need for international and regional cooperation in fostering gender equality in governance. Collaborative efforts, such as those led by the African Union and various international organisations, have been instrumental in supporting national governments to implement gender-responsive policies. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives relies on sustained political commitment, adequate funding, and robust monitoring mechanisms to ensure that gender equality objectives are met.

Ultimately, the reflections in this book call for a renewed commitment to dismantling the structural barriers that impede women's political participation. By fostering an enabling environment for women's leadership and addressing the root causes of gender inequality, societies can move closer



to achieving true democratic governance and sustainable development. The insights and recommendations provided in this volume serve as a valuable guide for policymakers, civil society, and all stakeholders dedicated to advancing gender parity in governance across Africa.

### **The Impact of African Women in Governance**

African women leaders have not only increased their presence in political spaces but have also brought fresh perspectives and a focus on issues directly affecting their communities. Their involvement has often led to the prioritisation of policies aimed at addressing gender disparities, improving access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, and reducing poverty. By championing these causes, African women in governance have played key roles in crafting policies that are not only inclusive but also reflective of the diverse needs of their constituencies. Their efforts have often resulted in more robust and equitable policy frameworks that foster sustainable development.

These leaders have demonstrated remarkable resilience and strategic acumen in navigating complex political landscapes, often marked by deep-seated patriarchal structures and resistance to change. Through their determination and advocacy, they have successfully mobilised support for gender-sensitive policies and reforms, enhancing the political, social, and economic inclusion of women and marginalised groups. Their ability to engage in regional and international collaboration has also been instrumental in bringing global attention to African women's issues, thus securing international support and resources for local initiatives.

The book emphasises the transformative potential of women's leadership styles, characterised by inclusivity, empathy, and a commitment to social justice. These qualities have enabled African women leaders to foster trust and cooperation amongst diverse groups, thereby promoting peace, stability, and development in their countries. Their leadership has not only improved the lives of many but has also set a new

standard for governance that prioritises the well-being of all citizens. The empathy-driven and inclusive approach of these leaders has been recognised and respected globally, contributing to the changing perceptions of leadership and governance in Africa.

By breaking down barriers and challenging patriarchal norms, African women in governance have reshaped narratives around power and leadership. Their successes have inspired a new generation of women to aspire to leadership roles, creating a ripple effect that extends beyond politics into various sectors. The visibility of these trailblazing women in governance serves as a testament to the capabilities and potential of women to lead effectively. It also highlights the importance of continued advocacy and support for women's participation in all levels of decision-making processes, ultimately contributing to more just and equitable societies.

### **Policies and Stakeholder Participation**

The importance of policies and stakeholder participation in promoting women's empowerment in governance cannot be overstated. The book's analysis of various policy frameworks and legal instruments, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and gender quotas, highlights the need for robust and enforceable measures to ensure women's representation. These policies are designed to break down systemic barriers that prevent women from accessing leadership roles and to create equality in political and economic spheres. However, the effectiveness of these policies hinges on their implementation and the political will to enforce them across different levels of governance.

Stakeholder engagement is essential for creating an enabling environment for women's participation. Governments, civil society organisations, international bodies, and the private sector all play key roles in this ecosystem. Collaborative efforts, such as consultations, dialogue forums, and partnerships, help to ensure that policies are inclusive and responsive to the needs of African women. This collective approach not only

enhances the legitimacy of the policies but also fosters a sense of ownership amongst the stakeholders, which is crucial for sustainable progress.

The book also emphasises the importance of data collection and monitoring to inform evidence-based policymaking and to track progress towards gender equality. Reliable data provides insights into the gaps and challenges faced by women, which can be addressed through targeted interventions. Moreover, data-driven approaches enable stakeholders to assess the impact of existing policies and refine them to better meet the objectives of women's empowerment. Transparency and accountability mechanisms are vital in this process to ensure that the goals of gender equality are consistently pursued.

Furthermore, the book discusses the role of advocacy and capacity-building initiatives in empowering women to participate actively in governance. By equipping women with the necessary skills and knowledge, these initiatives help to bridge the gap between policy and practice. Advocacy efforts also raise awareness about the importance of women's participation and help to challenge cultural and societal norms that may hinder their involvement. Through a combination of policy frameworks, stakeholder engagement, data-driven approaches, and advocacy, the book outlines a comprehensive strategy for enhancing women's empowerment in governance across Africa.

## Recommendations

To further advance the role of African women in governance, several key recommendations emerge from this book:

- 1. Strengthening Gender-Responsive Legislation:** Governments should enact and enforce laws that promote gender equality in political representation and leadership.
- 2. Enhancing Women's Leadership Training:** Capacity-building programmes and mentorship initiatives should be expanded to equip women with the skills and confidence needed to assume leadership roles.
- 3. Fostering Collaboration:** Partnerships between governments, civil society, and the private sector should be

strengthened to support women's empowerment initiatives and create inclusive governance structures.

4. **Promoting Gender-Balanced Appointments:** Public institutions should adopt policies to ensure gender balance in appointments and decision-making bodies.
5. **Education and awareness campaigns** should be implemented to challenge gender stereotypes, highlight the contributions of African women in governance, and encourage greater participation of women in political leadership and decision-making processes.

The rise of African women in governance is a testament to their resilience, determination, and commitment to creating positive change. This book has provided a comprehensive exploration of the policies, challenges, and successes that define women's political participation in Africa. The journey towards gender parity in governance is ongoing, and the insights and recommendations presented here serve as a road map for future progress.

By continuing to support women's empowerment and addressing the barriers to their full participation in governance, African nations can build more inclusive, democratic, and sustainable societies. The contributions of African women in governance are invaluable, and their continued rise will undoubtedly shape the future of the continent in profound and meaningful ways.

## Areas for Further Research

### Impact of Women's Leadership on Policy Outcomes

While the book emphasises the significance of African women's contributions to governance, particularly in advancing inclusive and equitable policies, future research should move beyond anecdotal narratives to empirically assess these impacts. There is a need for longitudinal and cross-national studies that evaluate how increased female political participation translates into specific policy shifts and outcomes, especially in sectors such as education, health, social protection, and economic

empowerment. For instance, do constituencies led by women experience measurable improvements in service delivery or resource allocation? How do women's legislative priorities differ from those of their male counterparts, and what implications does this have for national development goals? A deeper understanding of these questions would not only validate the transformative role of women in governance but also strengthen advocacy for sustained gender inclusion at all levels of decision-making.

### **Intersection of Youth, Gender, and Political Participation**

The experiences of young women in African governance present a rich but underexplored area of inquiry. As younger generations begin to engage more actively in political discourse, often through digital platforms, social media, and grassroots movements, it is essential to examine how these tools are being used to challenge patriarchal norms and expand access to political power. Future research should investigate how factors such as age, gender, class, and rural-urban divides intersect to shape the opportunities and barriers faced by young women aspiring to leadership.

### **Effectiveness and Sustainability of Affirmative Action Policies**

Affirmative action policies, including gender quotas and reserved seats, have become important tools for enhancing women's representation in African politics. However, their effectiveness in fostering genuine empowerment versus symbolic presence remains contested. Future research should interrogate how these policies are implemented, monitored, and institutionalised across different governance systems. Research should explore how local political cultures, party structures, and legal frameworks affect the durability of affirmative action measures. Understanding these dynamics is key to designing policies that not only open the door to political office but also create lasting pathways for gender equity.



# Index

## Symbols

4IR 1, 192, 195, 196, 202, 212, 214, 215, 216

2022 Gender Act 290, 291

## A

African Union 1, 8, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 35, 37, 43, 44, 45, 53, 63, 81, 83, 117, 170, 216, 225, 226, 227, 232, 242, 244, 245, 246, 248, 255, 256, 336, 343, 348, 380, 382

ANC 1, 18, 114, 117, 120, 121, 123, 124, 129, 136, 137, 138, 139, 145, 147, 158, 333, 334, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 362

## C

Candidate Selection 15, 87, 89, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 98, 99, 102, 106, 107, 108

Citizenship 15, 27, 47, 63, 64, 66, 70, 78, 84, 146, 160, 173, 174, 179, 194, 257, 273

Civil Society 1, 8, 10, 11, 13, 19, 41, 42, 53, 54, 57, 62, 69, 80, 111, 112, 178, 215, 217, 235, 307, 326, 380, 382, 383

COVID-19 18, 193, 196, 198, 206, 207, 216, 218, 220, 300, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 372, 375, 376, 377, 378

## D

Decision-Making 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 22, 23, 26, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 43, 44, 51, 52, 64, 66, 88, 92, 99, 112, 122, 127, 128, 134, 135, 137, 138, 139, 141, 142, 144, 148, 150, 151, 152, 154, 157, 158, 159, 174, 179, 180, 192, 196, 197, 199, 205, 210, 215, 225, 227, 228, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 244, 248, 249, 251, 257, 280, 281, 283, 289, 290, 291, 294, 303, 306, 307, 308, 309, 312, 314, 315, 316, 324, 325, 327, 335, 336, 382, 383, 384, 385

Democratic governance 17, 33, 41, 48, 84, 134, 139, 234, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 289, 290, 291, 295, 296, 297, 299, 300, 302, 304, 380

## E

Economic inclusion 48, 81, 198, 381

Effectiveness 15, 20, 33, 34, 37, 43, 57, 111, 116, 122, 123, 127, 128, 129, 130, 236, 243, 296, 306, 308, 312, 320, 324, 327, 371, 374, 380, 382, 385

## African Women in Governance

### F

Female Representation 6, 15, 33, 40, 41, 87, 91, 92, 93, 104, 111, 114, 121, 122, 123, 125, 127, 145, 166, 168, 174, 200, 236, 280, 281, 290, 295, 296

### G

Gender Equality 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 11, 15, 16, 17, 21, 34, 35, 37, 40, 42, 43, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 53, 57, 58, 59, 63, 69, 70, 75, 80, 83, 88, 108, 111, 112, 114, 115, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 128, 129, 130, 132, 135, 136, 138, 139, 142, 149, 150, 151, 152, 154, 158, 159, 160, 162, 163, 165, 166, 170, 171, 172, 175, 176, 178, 179, 185, 186, 188, 189, 191, 192, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 203, 204, 206, 209, 210, 213, 215, 216, 225, 226, 229, 230, 232, 233, 234, 235, 243, 245, 246, 248, 256, 260, 262, 263, 267, 269, 270, 271, 273, 275, 276, 279, 280, 281, 287, 288, 289, 290, 295, 296, 298, 300, 315, 317, 326, 334, 335, 336, 347, 360, 380, 383

Gender Equality Bill 2, 16, 165, 170, 172, 178, 186, 188

Gendering Democratisation 15, 61, 64, 68, 69, 70, 77, 79, 80

Gender Quota 16, 102, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 131, 136, 141, 199, 206, 225, 226, 227, 234, 236, 237, 238, 239, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 281, 294

Governance 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66, 68, 69, 70, 79, 84, 108, 115, 116, 123, 126, 128, 134, 135, 136, 137, 139, 143, 144, 145, 148, 149, 150, 155, 156, 158, 162, 175, 180, 187, 191, 192, 197, 199, 205, 212, 215, 216, 230, 233, 234, 246, 248, 259, 266, 277, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 289, 290, 291, 292, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 335, 336, 337, 343, 347, 349, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385

### H

Harmful Traditional Practice 17

### L

Land Rights Struggle 17, 251

Legislature 15, 93, 120, 133, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 149, 150, 152, 153, 155, 156, 158, 161, 167, 205, 265, 284, 370, 374

Livelihood 101, 166, 179, 353, 354, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 368, 370, 375



**P**

Parliamentary Elections 89, 99, 100, 102, 105

Patriarchy 5, 18, 48, 51, 56, 65, 86, 113, 146, 149, 155, 157, 186, 200, 203,  
208, 216, 221, 253, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 272, 277, 321, 324, 333,  
334, 340, 347, 348, 349

Political Chauvinism 16, 165, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186

Political Inclusion 6, 67, 69, 73, 84, 199

Political Participation 5, 10, 11, 15, 17, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 31, 32, 37, 38, 44,  
45, 46, 53, 55, 57, 62, 63, 65, 69, 84, 86, 91, 99, 103, 109, 111, 115,  
120, 121, 122, 124, 125, 128, 129, 131, 140, 142, 147, 148, 159, 161, 166,  
167, 177, 188, 189, 192, 199, 200, 201, 202, 204, 205, 208, 209, 211,  
212, 216, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 226, 227, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233,  
234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 244, 245, 246, 247, 249, 279, 281,  
282, 283, 285, 286, 288, 289, 290, 294, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300,  
301, 303, 304, 316, 380, 384, 385

Political Party 12, 13, 18, 19, 20, 70, 92, 94, 97, 109, 123, 124, 126, 158, 174,  
180, 182, 185, 186, 211, 238, 287, 289, 292, 293

Political Representation 5, 9, 12, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 32, 52, 53, 66, 83, 84,  
108, 110, 111, 112, 114, 115, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127,  
128, 129, 130, 131, 133, 135, 136, 138, 139, 140, 143, 163, 165, 180, 182,  
189, 225, 226, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 245, 246, 247, 279, 280,  
285, 290, 292, 294, 295, 297, 305, 379, 383

**R**

Rwanda 5, 6, 15, 31, 63, 74, 111, 112, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125,  
126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 187, 226, 230, 234, 236, 237, 238, 294,  
379

**S**

SDG5 191

Social Policy 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 57, 147, 353, 354, 355, 365, 371, 374, 375

Social Protection 13, 160, 206, 354, 355, 365, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 373,  
374, 376, 377, 384

South Africa 3, 5, 9, 15, 16, 18, 22, 23, 24, 37, 40, 49, 52, 58, 74, 111, 112,  
113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128,  
129, 131, 132, 133, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 142, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150,  
159, 160, 162, 163, 165, 184, 187, 191, 204, 212, 218, 225, 226, 230,  
236, 238, 240, 247, 251, 252, 254, 256, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264,  
265, 266, 267, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 294,  
300, 303, 305, 306, 310, 311, 313, 328, 329, 330, 331, 334, 338, 340,  
342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 348, 349, 350, 353, 356, 357, 358, 362, 363,  
364, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 379

Stakeholders 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 23, 33, 43, 186, 205, 222, 232,  
297, 307, 310, 380, 382, 383

## African Women in Governance

### T

Traditional Societies 17, 64, 251, 252, 253, 271

### W

Women's Inclusion 13, 16, 25, 112, 113, 123, 139, 146, 166, 209, 262, 326

Women's Political Participation 5, 10, 11, 17, 21, 25, 26, 27, 31, 37, 38, 44, 45, 46, 53, 55, 62, 63, 65, 86, 91, 109, 111, 120, 121, 122, 124, 125, 129, 131, 140, 142, 147, 148, 159, 166, 167, 177, 189, 199, 200, 201, 204, 205, 208, 209, 218, 222, 226, 227, 229, 230, 231, 232, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 244, 245, 246, 247, 281, 282, 283, 285, 286, 289, 290, 296, 298, 300, 301, 303, 304, 380, 384

### Y

Youth 1, 29, 30, 40, 42, 63, 81, 144, 152, 230, 273, 303, 310, 315, 336, 337, 344, 345, 346, 347, 350, 367, 385





**African Political Science  
and International Relations  
in Focus Series**

Across Africa, women are transforming the political landscape, achieving historic levels of representation. Yet, their journey is marked by complex challenges and strategic triumphs. This book moves beyond simple celebration to provide a rigorous analysis of the policies and power dynamics shaping women's participation in African governance. Across 13 insightful chapters, this volume investigates the tangible forces behind this change. It examines the real-world impact of gender quotas in countries like Rwanda and South Africa, reveals how women navigate male-dominated political parties, and showcases their role in advancing critical issues from anti-corruption and land rights to healthcare and economic development. Drawing on case studies from across the continent, this collection dissects the successes, setbacks, and ongoing struggles in the fight for equitable representation.

By blending scholarly research with practical policy analysis, this book offers an essential guide to understanding how African women are overcoming systemic barriers to lead. It is a critical resource for anyone committed to understanding the future of inclusive governance and political power in Africa.



**UJ Press**

ISBN 978-3-997466-36-7



9 781997 466367 >