




## 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.

Khupuzza 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.

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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.

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