



Flone Initiative

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### Abstract

This policy brief explores factors that affect the participation of women in local governance structures and investigates challenges that women face in their struggles to represent the voices of their communities. A qualitative research approach was applied in which five interviews were conducted with female mayors and councillors and secondary data was also included. The findings revealed that some female mayors and councillors encounter myriad barriers including bullying, patriarchy, abuse, unsupportive laws, policies, and lack of recognition. The brief concludes with policy recommendations on how to overcome these challenges.

### About ICLD

The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is part of the Swedish development cooperation. The mandate of the organization is to contribute to poverty alleviation by strengthening local governments.

# Women's quest to participate in local governance in Botswana

## Introduction

As in any society, women in Botswana have always played a significant role including looking after their household and other socio-cultural responsibilities. Women constitute more than half of the country's population and yet they have limited economic opportunities and participation in various institutions and governance structures. This policy brief explores the barriers faced by women as they strive to participate in local politics. Despite these barriers, some improvements can be observed regarding women serving on council chair committees and in council management, as well as being employed in administrative positions in district and urban councils. Table 1 shows a minor increase of women in these roles between 2017 and 2019.

**Table 1.** Botswana: Women's representation in local government

| % of women                  | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|-----------------------------|------|------|------|
| in council management       | -    | 39%  | 43%  |
| employed in councils        | 52%  | -    | 55%  |
| on council chair committees | 21%  | 24%  | -    |

**Source:** Gender Links, Annual Report, Botswana, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

The representation of women in leadership positions in local governance structures remains very low. Table 2 shows that between 2004 and 2019 the proportion of female councillors ranged from 18 percent to 23 percent. Female mayors were significantly few: out of a total of 16 mayoral positions in the country, only three were held by women in 2004, one in 2009 and three in 2014 (CLFG, 2017–18).

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**Table 2.** Botswana: Gender breakdown of councilors and mayors, 2004–2019

| Councilors          | 2004      |              | 2009      |              | 2014      |              | 2019      |              |
|---------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
|                     | #         | %            | #         | %            | #         | %            | #         | %            |
| Female councilors   | 116       | 19.6         | 139       | 23.1         | 110       | 18.1         | 111       | 19           |
| Male councilors     | 475       | 80.4         | 464       | 76.9         | 499       | 81.9         | 493       | 81           |
| Total councilors    | 591       | 100.0        | 603       | 100.0        | 609       | 100.0        | 604       | 100.0        |
| <b>Chairpersons</b> |           |              |           |              |           |              |           |              |
| Female mayors       | 3         | 18.8         | 1         | 6.3          | 3         | 18.8         | 2*        | 12.3         |
| Male mayors         | 13        | 87.2         | 15        | 93.8         | 13        | 87.2         | 14        | 87.4         |
| <b>Total mayors</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

**Source:** Commonwealth Local Government Forum, 2017–18; Gender Links, Annual Report, Botswana, 2019; Afro-Barometer, 2021, \*Telephone enquiry to City Council, 6 July 2021.

## Evidence and comparison

As Table 3 shows, the participation of women as councilors and mayors in Botswana remains very low compared to other countries in southern Africa. In Botswana, women occupy only 111 seats (18 percent) out of the 604 available in local government (Afro-Barometer, 2021). This figure falls far below the 50 percent expectation set by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), established by 12 member states. Its protocol requires half of political and senior management positions to be held by women, in order to promote gender and development in the region (SADC, 2011).

Women hold fewer than 15 percent of senior political positions in Botswana (9.5 percent in 2014 and 11.1 percent in 2019), and only 19 percent of district council positions, despite constituting 55 percent of the vote (CLGF, 2019). Factors contributing to low representation are mainly patriarchal practices and attitudes, socialisation barriers and socio-economic and socio-cultural factors that inhibit participation in various sectors of the society (African Development Bank, 2015). Furthermore, the low participation and representation of women is also blamed on Botswana's electoral system of first-past-the-post and its lack of a quota system (CLGF, 2019; Afro-Barometer, 2021). Table 3 shows that countries that have increased women's representation in local government have electoral systems based on proportional representation, constitutional or legislated quota, or a voluntary party quota system (Afro-Barometer, 2021).

**Table 3.** Women's political participation in selected countries in the SADC: by electoral system and quota in local government

| Country      | Election year | No. of seats | No. of women | % women | Quota system           | Electoral system             |
|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Botswana     | 2019          | 604          | 111          | 18      | Voluntary party quota  | First-past-the-post          |
| Namibia      | 2020          | 281          | 126          | 45      | Constituted/legislated | Mixed                        |
| Lesotho      | 2017          | 1394         | 555          | 40      | Constituted/legislated | Mixed                        |
| Rwanda       | 2018          | 100          | 62           | 62      | Constituted/legislated | Proportionate representation |
| South Africa | 2016          | 10 235       | 4219         | 41      | Voluntary party quota  | Mixed                        |

Source: Afro-Barometer, 2021

### What is the problem?

Women are being disadvantaged by multiple barriers.

- Patriarchy - a system of male dominance where men are considered head of households and they control all the decision making (Christ, 2016).
- Socialisation- where children learn by imitating and observing others such as parents and community members (Maccoby, 2000).
- Gender-based violence, and
- Limited access to resources.

These barriers prevent women from participating in activities that will make their voices heard. Generally, women and girls face many challenges from a very young age; they receive limited support and encouragement from their families and from society at large. This is particularly common in rural communities where cultural and societal norms and beliefs dictate that women's and girls' roles should be to look after the household (Africa Development Bank, 2015). Such restrictions generally stifle young girls' and women's aspirations to join politics and try for leadership positions (Gender Links, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Elections & Voting: Secretary of State Ardoin's Statement on Fall 2021 Elections, accessed at [www.sos.la.gov](http://www.sos.la.gov) on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2021.

**Table 4:** Electoral systems and Temporary Measures

|                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| a) Constitutional/Legislated Quota System | Legislated provisions for affirmative action or equal opportunity (positive discrimination) by reserving certain % of seats or candidates to increase representation of minority groups or women. |
| b) Proportionate Representation (PR)      | Citizens vote for parties allocated seats in Parliament according to % of votes they receive.                                                                                                     |
| c) First-Past-the Post (FPTP)             | Citizens vote for the party and candidate who represent the party in a geographical area and the winner takes it all based on a simple majority system.                                           |
| d) Voluntary Quota System                 | Political parties field a certain/voluntary #/% of women candidates.                                                                                                                              |
| e) Open Election                          | An election where any candidate qualifies to be elected or any eligible voter can vote regardless of party <sup>2</sup> .                                                                         |

Source: Afro-Barometer, 2021, Ardoin, 2021.

## Research methods

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted from 7<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020, with a female mayor, deputy mayor and three women councilors who were purposively sampled across local government in the northeastern, north, southern, southeastern and southwestern parts of the country. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted from 7<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020, with a female mayor, deputy mayor and three women councilors who were purposively sampled across local government in the northeastern, north, southern, southeastern and southwestern parts of the country. Secondary sources were reviewed, including books and other articles. Interview questions focused on challenges faced by female councilors, including factors contributing to lower representation of women in local government; confidence to stand for elections; reducing gender inequality; and advice to young women aspiring to enter politics.

## Results and conclusions

### Challenges

**Lack of recognition and support from male councilors** was a barrier as *‘women are not taken seriously especially during council debates and not given an opportunity to table their motions or comment on issues raised’* (NE-1). Women do not support each other as *‘women would rather support male candidates and can be persuaded to change their support and commitment to a male candidate’* (S-1).



**Gender-based violence, oppression, discrimination, and bullying** emerged as major challenges as *‘women are insulted, called names and ridiculed’* (NE-1).

Moreover, women must work extra hard to prove capability to lead. as a former mayor expressed the difficulties of leading other former male mayors and of demonstrating that she is capable of leading (N-2).

**Lack of resources** is a problem as *‘politics need financial stability and a lot of time you have to be out socialising so that voters can know you and vote for you – if you don’t have time, they will not vote for you’* (S-3).

**Patriarchy**, which a system of male dominance is a major barrier as *‘not many women can withstand the challenges of being an aspirant in politics as women are insulted in political rallies, sometimes called names – as I was said to be too old and a grandmother that needs to stay at home’* (N-2). S-3 said, *‘women have to humble themselves and be traditional to win, if you are outspoken and act like an “iron lady”, they will scold you as they did to a former minister’*.

**Fear of being in leadership positions** were hurdles that women face as *‘you must be brave because of the abuse, bullying by men and other women in politics’* (NE-1). Regarding the SADC protocol on gender, S-3 said, *‘the protocol exists, but it does not help because when the time comes for elections, men fight for positions and power, and they get them.’*



### Approaches to strengthen female leaders

**Branding yourself, having a plan/strategy and being focused** was emphasised. S-3 said *‘I believe in voter education, so when I went into politics, I started seminars educating the community and voters on what I can do for them. I didn’t buy voters, not even buying t-shirts or anything’*. She said *‘I am young, so I ignored the noise. I didn’t claim to know anything, but I told voters that I am bringing solutions to their problems’* (S-3).

**Networking** with other women and voter education at community level will enhance women’s participation. As one councilor said, community engagement helped her to get re-elected for a second term. *‘I consulted on all council issues and got ideas through kgotla meetings<sup>3</sup>, meetings with Ward Development Committees<sup>4</sup> and created a WhatsApp group to enhance communication’* (SE-5).

**Having a supportive family** was said to be very important in helping women to participate in local government elections and balance their role with household chores, which are still predominantly and disproportionately carried out by women.

**Empowerment training:** One piece of crucial advice to young women aspiring to enter politics is to plan, research the councilor position, and get known in the community before campaigning – this builds a person’s confidence. This involves networking vigorously and attending empowerment workshops.

<sup>3</sup> A traditional meeting place to discuss issues affecting the community

<sup>4</sup> Coucillors represent a ward/community in a city and work with ward/village development committees to coordinate development projects ([www.library.fes.de](http://www.library.fes.de)).

### Policy recommendations

The following recommendations involve councillors, chiefs, district councils, central government<sup>5</sup>, political parties, ward/village development committees, non-governmental organizations, women/youth agencies, private sector and council's international partners.

#### Strategy to increase numbers of women leaders

- a) Adopt an electoral system that uses quotas to increase gender equality as this has worked in countries such as Rwanda and South Africa. Women's wings should lobby for a review of the electoral system, setting of a quota and use affirmative action approach to reserve positions for marginalised segments of society.
- b) Implement gender protocols and ensure there is commitment within political leadership to ensure equal representation of women in committees.

#### Education and training

- a) To counter the fear of being in leadership positions, organize workshops to empower voters and demonstrate that women can stand for elections and win, just like men. This could be achieved through the Gender Affairs department in conjunction with women's/youth organisations and international agencies like Gender Links.
- b) Local authorities and academic institutions like the University of Botswana and Gender Links should train women to be confident and brand themselves. Furthermore, Independent Electoral Commission, Gender Affairs, Kgotla/wards, political parties, should educate men to give women opportunities to become leaders.
- c) Women's wings, youth agencies and women councillors should conduct vigorous political education through social media platforms and other forums to empower women to campaign for female candidates and avoid being persuaded by men to campaign for male candidates.
- c) Educate women on human rights and motivate them to form associations to lobby for protection and to take up leadership positions. This could be achieved by utilising existing policies and workshops offered by the government, human rights agencies, Gender Links and NGOs for women such as Emang Basadi.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> District administration: includes District Commissioner and the Police.

<sup>6</sup> Emang Basadi: NGO established in 1986 by a group of women to advocate and lobby for women's rights, equality, justice, peace and empowerment to change women's social, political, economic and legal positions ([www.emangbasadi.org.bw](http://www.emangbasadi.org.bw)).

## Questions for local governments

1. What are the main barriers to women's political participation in your local government?
2. What opportunities are offered by local and international agencies to strengthen female leaders? How can your local authority take advantage of these opportunities?
3. What support systems does your local authority offer to empower women to participate in local governance?

### Local authorities should establish a support system for women

- a) Establish supportive community-based structures and use existing facilities such as parks, primary schools, and daycare centres. These could be refurbished through community-based fund-raising activities and campaigning by councilors to engage the private sector to assist through their corporate social responsibility programmes.

Utilise Councilors WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages to share day-to-day challenges with their communities. The same could be extended to village development committees<sup>7</sup> as they work closely with councilors<sup>8</sup> and central government agencies ([www.gov.bw](http://www.gov.bw)).

- b) Political parties should work with other democracy and human rights agencies to address bullying of female candidates and promote a positive environment at rallies and polling stations.

### Male leaders should acknowledge female counterparts

- a) To deal with lack of recognition and support from male councilors, efforts should be made through community forums like the *kgotla* system, a traditional meeting place (Moumakwa, 2011; Lekorwe, 2011).
- b) Utilise chiefs<sup>9</sup>, headmen<sup>10</sup>, village development committees, women/youth empowerment platforms, social media groups to educate, create awareness and in the process develop a culture of supporting women and girls to venture into politics.

### Provide women with networking opportunities

- a) Local authorities should promote networking, through community representatives and using existing websites and social media platforms to motivate women and youth to discuss issues affecting their community and participate in local governance.

### Local authorities should empower women economically

- a) Local authorities should through their trade licensing units work with central government's financing agencies to harmonise financial policies to assist female entrepreneurs in the informal sector to financially empower them to enter politics and participate in local governance.

<sup>7</sup> Village development committees (VDCs) are established through the Council Act to coordinate development at local/ward level ([www.clgf.org.uk/regions/southern](http://www.clgf.org.uk/regions/southern)).

<sup>8</sup> Gaborone City Council has a Facebook page.

<sup>9</sup> A Chief: Head of a village, falls under tribal administration and is member of the district council.

<sup>10</sup> Community/ward leaders: work closely with the Chief (Moumakwa, 2011)



## References and Further Reading

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*The recommendations (or views) contained in this policy brief exclusively reflect those of its authors.*

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