

# ASSESSING THE ROLE OF GENDER IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE [POLITICAL CONTEXT]: THE CASE OF SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES

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**Abstract:** Due to social and economic factors, gender inequality persists in society requiring initiatives for women empowerment. It is vital that government policies are gender-sensitive incorporating the elements of gender-disaggregated data, gender-based demography, gender-based tasks and gender equality resulting in women empowerment. The review of relevant literature, official documents and international/regional/national policies [descriptive and analytical methodology] reveal the lack of participation by women in political decision-making, especially at grass-roots level. The reasons could be, *inter alia*, the lack of skills, capacities, household responsibilities, societal pressure and cultural beliefs. This nature of constraints can be overcome through building women's capacity for improved political involvement in local governance [a hypothetical statement].

In order to find solutions, the article raises the following questions for [on-going] debate and discussion: What is the magnitude of gender-awareness in political decision-making in municipalities? To what extent are gender equity policies implemented at grass-roots level? Are municipalities acknowledging the need to empower women? Are there any initiatives in place to capacitate women to ensure participation in decision-making processes? There are diverse arguments on this issue. The strong augmentation emphasizes the significance of the normative approach that supports public participation as a form of transformation. Another augmentation stresses the instrumental approach supporting the political decentralization for participatory decision-making at grass-roots level. In order to find answers to the above questions, the article investigates at the status of women in South African local governance [political context].

The article utilizes an empowerment approach of the feminist theory. The empowerment approach has its own indicators for measurement varying from individual to collective at micro and macro levels. The micro level symbolizes an individual seeking progression from subjugation to an evolutionary personality. The macro level symbolizes the institutions/authorities/regulations taking relevant decisions regarding progression of individuals. In this article, the micro level, that is, the individuals, are women seeking empowerment and recognition, while the macro levels are municipalities (organizations), authorities (political office-bearers), and regulations (gender equality policies and programmes).

The article recommends that it is vital to review and revise existing constitutional, political, legislative and regulatory frameworks, including electoral systems, to remove provisions that hinder women's equal participation in the decision-making processes. To facilitate research on the conditions under which women representation is enhanced in political parties, parliament and government at all spheres is significant. The government must ensure monitoring and evaluation of the participation and representation of women in the decision-making processes. At the political level, the parties must review and revise their manifesto and structures to accommodate the participation of women. To enhance the participation of women in political decision-making, a quota on gender is being considered as an important policy measure. At the social level, there is a need to change attitudes that should include: the culture of local government needs to be reviewed to ensure that women are treated fairly and equally; discrimination against women is unacceptable; gender awareness programmes for men and women need to be developed; and opportunities need to be availed to women as soon as they are elected so that they can learn about local government, governance and receive the required support.

**Keywords:** empowerment approach; gender; gender equity; local governance; women empowerment.

## INTRODUCTION

Gender is conceptually defined by various scholars and academics (Esplen & Jolly, 2006; Azarbaijani-Moghaddam: 2007; Anderson & Taylor, 2008; Connell, 2009; Anderson, 2010; Popenoe, 2010; Clinton, 2012) as varied roles and responsibilities related to men and women. Inglehart & Pippa (2003) claim that “gender is the socially produced difference between feminine and masculine” (p.1). Holmes (2007) on the other hand argues that “gender is the socially and culturally learned expectations and behaviours associated with members of each sex” (p.2). Based on varied attributes, both men and women deserve equal respect, opportunities and appreciation in society. This article is based upon the feminist aspect of gender exploring the need of transformative divergence from welfare to the empowerment of women. The article, therefore, employs the “empowerment approach of feminist theory” (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2013, p. 5) as a theoretical framework. The empowerment, according to the Commission on Women and Development (2007), is a process that has two dimensions:

- “individual: the acquisition of greater independence and capacity for self-determination, as well as means to allow individuals to broaden their opportunities, and
- collective: the capacity of a group to influence social change and move towards a fair and equal society, in particular in its relations between men and women” (p. 6).

An “empowerment theory requires a convincing integration of the micro and macro levels in order to make clear the interrelations among individual, community, and professional empowerment” (<http://www.mpow.org>, 2012). The approach is also considerable reasonable to translate the “political ramifications of women’s empowerment that is the transformation of gender relations into gender planning” (Wieringa, 1994, p. 830), required in South African municipalities.

The concept gender in this article focuses on women and aims to explore the inclusion/exclusion of women in local governance political processes in South African municipal governance.

## TRENDS IN WOMEN PARTICIPATION FOR POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING

The study of historical, philosophical, political texts show that “women have been kept outside the public domain of politics as most of the political thinkers and philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, John Lock, Thomas Hobbes and Hegel considered women fit only for domestic roles in the private sphere and maintained that there was no place for women in politics because of their suitability in caring roles as mothers and wives” (Rai in Bari, 2005). With emergence of feminist approaches, scholars began to argue the significance of normative political theory that failed to establish the political character of one’s private/individualistic life-path, and was unsuccessful in determining and offering the ‘citizenship’ aspect to women. Later, the liberal political theory raised the concept of free citizenship/individualistic approach bringing gender aspect in politics and society as a whole. Bari (2005), therefore, claims that feminist theorists also challenged the notion of the abstract individual in liberal theory and argued that it is not a gender-neutral category. Consequently, despite women having the right to vote, they were neither able to impact on public policy nor could they bring the private sphere in the preview of the public. Even western democracies displaced women on many fronts. If “this is the basis on which the case for women’s representation in general rests, what is the specific case for women representation in institutions of local democracy? However, it needs to be emphasized that *representation is only the first, necessary but by no means sufficient, condition for effective participation*. The distinction between representation and participation is important for the one does not necessarily entail the other” (Jayal, 2005).

In conjunction with intellectual and theoretical arguments, there are many practical and existing barriers that underestimate and under-represent women in the political participation. Some of them are: “*fundamental inequality*: while women have constitutional rights they are not seen as equal; *political and economical instability*: affects the development of a political culture with democratic norms; *discrimination*: women face discrimination when standing for office and when elected or appointed to local government positions; and *the male environment with political institutions*: while there are few women on decision-making bodies the styles and modes of working are those that are acceptable to men” (obtained from United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2001).

The other factors include “*security*: women face risks to their physical safety and security by participating in peace negotiations and political leadership; *psychological*: women themselves may lack confidence and choose not to engage; and *overarching*: gender equality and women’s participation is generally sidelined during the peace process” (obtained from United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2006). The deep-rooted causes include

“*ideological factors*: patriarchy as a system of male dominance shapes women’s relationship in politics” (Bari, 2005); “*contextual factors*: includes lack of effective monitoring mechanisms; lack of resources; need for sponsoring women to run for political positions; lack of women role models; lack of solidarity among women” (Economic Commission for Africa, 2007). Other barriers include the lack of knowledge, understanding and orientation regarding municipal administration and municipal acts; lack of knowledge regarding the strategic and technical aspects of municipal programmes, public participation and service delivery mechanisms; lack of support and co-operation from family, colleagues, municipal bodies and political party; lack of experience and training related to communication, negotiation and decision-making skills to deal with complex municipal issues. These may vary across other countries.

### STATUS OF WOMEN IN AFRICA: A HOLISTIC OVERVIEW

Throughout Southern Africa, the historical legacy of suppression of women rights paved the way towards feminist movements questioning the status of women in the democratization process. The feminist movements were aimed to demand gender equity and equality in the social, economical and political systems, raising questions such as: “What has been the impact of women’s movements during the democratic transitions of Southern African states? What plans do the women’s movements have during the democratic transitions? How has the involvement of women’s movements in democratic transitions improved the socioeconomic status of women vis-à-vis men in African society? How has the National Gender Machineryes (NGMs) — government institutionalized feminism — affected women’s mobilization and their subsequent impact on democratization in Southern Africa?” (Conaway, undated, p. 2-3). The scholars have analyzed political and liberal democracy theories to establish the role of women in political decision-making in Southern Africa (refer Larry, 1999; Ngoma, 2006; Shireen, 2006; Samson, 2008; Kathleen, 2008; Dejene, 2010), and exploring contextual arrangement in various Southern African countries (refer van Guy, 1990; van Driel, 1994; Du Toit, 1995; Hassim and Meintjes, 2005; Gisela, 2006; Tanga, 2008; Aili Mari, 2008). The academic and scholarly debates, coupled with feminist-activist movements in Africa, resulted in the addendum to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, known as the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. The Charter was adopted by the African Union (AU) in 2003 followed by the Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, adopted in the Third Ordinary Session of the UN Assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 2004.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has, therefore, made commitments in the spirit of global declarations (United Nations’ (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW], Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals [MDG])<sup>1</sup>, and African Declarations (Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women In Africa) regarding the participation of women at grass-roots politics. The Southern African Regional Symposium on Women in Local Government was held in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1996 to review the participation of women in local government in the SADC region. In 1997, SADC Heads of State committed for at least 30 percent women representation in all areas of decision-making as part of the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development signed in Malawi.

In the case of South Africa, “women have countenanced two forms of resistance: one from the former Apartheid capitalist government and the other from the resistance forged by men within the liberation movements. All South African women: African, white, Coloured, and Indians countenance tremendous pressure from the Apartheid government although in dissimilar scales and fought jointly to dissolve the repressive system” (refer Qoboshiyana, 2011, p. 3-4). The [existing] veracity being that South African women [still] “have been exploring ways in which their cultural and historical realities can be a point of departure for in feminist scholarship and the world view” (Gasa, 2007: 42). This statement can be entrenched in South Africa through the views of Colleen Lowe Morna, Executive Director (Gender Links, 2012), who proclaims that “South Africa is a country that is ‘of the people, by the people and for the people,’ not ‘of men, by men and for men’” (p.1). During the 11th Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture series for 2013, Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory chairperson, Dr Njabulo Ndebele (2013) stated that “... we still suffer from some very strong and outdated attitudes towards differences in genders and the rights of men and women”(p.1). Quoting the words of Mr Nelson Mandela, Ndebele (2013) concluded that “the cause of women’s emancipation is part of our national struggle against outdated practices and prejudices. It is a struggle that demands equal effort from both men and women alike” (p.1). Dr De Matos Ala (The Skills Portal, 2012), supports the views and further states that states that, “culturally, the patriarchal status quo remains relatively unchanged, and unless the mind-set behind gender discriminatory practices is challenged through debate, media campaigns, education, etc. nothing much is going to change”(p.1).

The situation is dire at grass-roots level where, according to Evertzen (2001), “women are still hampered by many barriers, individual as well as institutional factors, related to the organisation of society and the political system,

with the risk that they will not reap equal benefits” (p.3). That is the reason that “the representation of women in local authority leadership positions in Africa is still limited” (Kinuthia-Njenga, 2010.;p. 16).

### STATUS OF WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICAN LOCAL GOVERNANCE: THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

The status of women in the political context is significantly stated by Madeleine K. Albright, National Democratic Institute [NDI] Chairman (NDI, 2013), as,

*“Every country deserves to have the best possible leader and that means that women have to be given a chance to compete. If they’re never allowed to compete in the electoral process then the countries are really robbing themselves of a great deal of talent”* (p.1).

The history of oppression and subjugation of women raises the question of the rights of women in the new dispensation. Advocates of gender equity emphasize that women’s rights are human rights (Maharaj, 2007,p. 1). The South African Women’s Charter of 1994 defines the rights and participation of women in governance as (Seidman, 1999; also refer Maharaj, 2007):

*“[c]onventionally, democracy and human rights have been defined and interpreted in terms of men’s experiences...If democracy and human rights are to be meaningful for women, they must address our historical subordination and oppression. Women participate in, and shape, the nature and form of our democracy”* (p.1-2).

In order to implement the legislative measures and promote democratic governance by providing gender balance in local governance, Table 1 explores the South African scenario according to municipal category, statistics based on 2000 elections:

**Table 1: Women councillors in South Africa: municipal elections 2000**

Province	Category A:Metropolitan Councils	Category B:Local Councils	Category C:District Councils [c]
Eastern Cape	29	292	40
Free State	-	156	22
Gauteng	172	104	16
KwaZulu Natal	50	305	35
Mpumalanga	-	224	26
North West	-	206	25
Northern Cape	-	111	12
Northern Province	-	222	30
Western Cape	61	91	9
Total (2272)	312 (29.7%)	1745 (27.4%)	215 (29.4%)

[c] Includes District Management Area councilors

Source: Pottie, D. 2001.

Similar data is not available for municipal elections 2006 and 2011. The aggregate sum of women in local government elections in 1995, 2000, 2006, and 2011 is reflected below in table 2.

**Table 2: Gender and local government in South Africa**

<b>Year</b>	<b>% women ward</b>	<b>% women PR</b>	<b>% women overall</b>
1995	11%	28%	19%
2000	17%	38%	29%
2006	37%	42%	40%
2011	33%	43%	38%

Source: Gender Links 2011.

Table 2 explores that there was an increase in women participation from 1995 to 2006. The percentage dropped in the 2011 municipal elections. The statistics of gender participation during the municipal elections 2000, 2006, and 2011 is reflected in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Gender Participation: 2000, 2006, and 2011**

<b>Gender participation</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>
Male	21519 (71.54 %)	29471 (65.22%)	33 865 (63.19%)
Female	8562 (28.46%)	15718 (34.78%)	19 731 (36.81%)
<b>Total candidates</b>	<b>30081 (100.00%)</b>	<b>45189 (100.00%)</b>	<b>53 596 (100.00%)</b>

Source: Adapted from Independent Electoral Commission, 2000, 2006 and 2011.

The data stated in tables 2 and 3 reflect that the gender balance at local governance has almost reached the target of 30% in comparison to the previous elections in 1995 and 1996, where a mere 19% of the councilors elected were women. During the municipal elections 2000, of the 8037 councilors elected, 72% were men and 28% were women; the total of 1651 women were elected as councilors on the PR list who won seats for a party; and 633 women were elected as councilors who won ward seats for a party. Women participation increased by at least 6.3% during the 2006 municipal elections. This was the year when the African National Congress [ANC] introduced the 50-50 quota for women representation in local government elections. Unfortunately, the intention was not sustained and according to Gender Links (2011), "the 2011 local government elections that witnessed a decline in women's representation at the very moment that South Africa should be redoubling its efforts to achieve gender parity underscores the need for a legislated quota for women in national and local elections..... a gender analysis of the 18 May 2011 local government election...shows that women now constitute 38% of councilors following the 18 May polls, down from 40% in 2006" (p. 1). Furthermore, Advocate Pansy Tlakula, IEC Chief Electoral Officer (Commission for Gender Equality, 2011), highlighted the trends in political participation and representation of women. She stated that "with women comprising the majority of South Africa's population, as well as the majority of registered voters, it was disturbing to note that this has not translated into women's equal representation as party candidates and public representatives" (p. 1). It is, therefore, noted that the Municipal Structures Act, 1998 is not considered as obligatory for political parties "to ensure that half of all party candidates on their lists are women" (Letsholo, 2006: 13).

The detailed information regarding the parties, party list candidates, ward candidates, independents, and total number of candidates nominated for the municipal elections is reflected in table 4. The latest election statistics reflecting the number of women candidates per province is indicated in table 5. The statistical information reflected in these tables is significant for comparative analysis concerning gender and local elections in South Africa.

**Table 4: Key comparative data on municipal elections**

Comparison	2000	2006	2011
Parties contesting	79	97	121
Party list candidates	16,573	21,507	23,278
Ward candidates	13,214	23,672	29,570
Independents	690	667	748
Total candidates	30,477	45,179	53,596
Gender breakdown	Male 66%	Male 65%	Male 63%
	Female 34%	Female 35%	Female 37%
Uncontested wards	75	11	7

Source: Compiled by GL with data from the IEC, 2011; Morna and Mbadlanyana, 2012.

Table 4 is a reflection of gender disparities. The male dominance in municipal elections sustained at above 60% and female suppression continued with 34% to the maximum of 37% participation.

**Table 5: Women candidates by province, 2011**

Province	Female	%
Eastern Cape	2,743	37.99
Free State	1,167	35.56
Gauteng	3,571	39.44
KwaZulu Natal	3,554	34.21
Limpopo	2,593	38.77
Mpumalanga	1,571	35.97
North West	1,608	39.84
Northern Cape	649	40.56
Western Cape	2,275	32.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,731</b>	<b>36.81</b>

Source: Independent Electoral Commission, 2011: 1.

Table 5 is a replication of table 4 demonstrating the maximum of 40% participation of women in municipal elections per province. It can be inferred from the analysis of local government election results that “the Municipal Structures Act hints at a quota as it calls on political parties to seek to ensure that women constitute at least 30% of list candidates, and to make them "electable" by placing men and women alternately on lists. To date, the ANC is the only political party to state publicly its commitment to reach this target. The standard set by the ANC has not resulted in contagion, that is, no opposition parties have yet taken up the challenge of implementing this quota” (Ballington, 2001: 1). In order to improve the situation, the following needs to be considered viz. “first, in the absence of clear directions from the Structures Act, the parties need practical policies to indicate compliance. Secondly, party quotas that are consistent with the Structures Act can be used as a measure to achieve compliance with the Act. Thirdly, the effectiveness of the gender quotas can only be assessed if all parties have adopted such policies” (Selokela, p. 39). This has not taken place as reflected in table 6 below.

**Table 6: Trends in women's representation by political parties from 2006 and 2011 Municipal Elections**

Political Party	2006				2011			
	Women	Men	Total	% Women	Women	Men	Total	% Women
ANC	2400	2852	5252	46	2665	3429	6094	44
DA	299	700	999	30	503	1158	1661	30
IFP	199	480	676	29	95	285	380	25
COPE*					74	187	261	28

\*New Party

Source: IEC, 2006; Gender Links, 2011; Selokela, 2012.

Table 6 is an indication that 50 percent of the target regarding the representation of women has not been achieved by any of the political parties. The ANC is close to the target and intentional consideration in this regard may assist the party to achieve the objective. The Democratic Alliance [DA] is the main opposition party reflecting a lack of gender-awareness in political representation. COPE was established in 2008 but seems inconsiderate towards the gender-based quota. Table 6 reflects a wide gap relating to gender-based representation in local elections.

The Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Minister Sicelo Shiceka (Buanews, 2009), has called for more women to become involved in local government, especially at ward level (p.1). This can be substantiated during the research in KwaZulu Natal (Williamson *et al.*, 2006), where "many women councilors ensured that ward level meetings are held at accessible venues during times that are suitable for the women. Others conduct issue-based meetings with relevant local groups when the need arises. These meetings include representatives from women's organisations, and tend to be dominated by women" (p.9).

## METHODS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher was given an opportunity to facilitate short-courses to municipal councillors/employees from several District and Local municipalities in South Africa. The sessions were utilized to explore the status of women in local governance. Utilizing the qualitative approach, two different structured questionnaires were distributed to the available municipal office-bearers. Significant responses were received.

The first questionnaire was distributed to 73 learners during various sessions between March-July 2013. The demography of the respondents and responses are stated in tables 7-10 below.

**Table 7: Demography: questionnaire 01**

Name of the municipality	Female	Male	Total
City of Matlosana Local Municipality	7	0	7
Kagisano-Molopo Local Municipality	6	2	8
Lekwa Local Municipality	0	1	1
Madibeng Local Municipality	4	15	19
Mafube Local Municipality	6	1	7
Matjhabeng Local Municipality	0	1	1
Mogale City Local Municipality	2	1	3
Moretele Local Municipality	3	4	7
Ratlou Local Municipality	2	0	2
Bojanala Platinum District Municipality	1	1	2
Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati District Municipality	7	9	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>73</b>

The demography of the respondents reveals a positive attitude towards increased participation of women for capacity-building initiatives, hence supporting the empowerment approach utilized as a theoretical scaffold in this article.

The responses below (refer to table 8) are stated under various themes and the responses are gender-unbiased.

**Table 8: Responses: Questionnaire 01**

Themes	Responses		Total
	Yes	No	
The municipality has women councillors	41	32	73 (100%)
Measures are in place to improve the number of women councillors	32	41	73 (100%)
The municipality allows women participation in policy-making stages	54	19	73 (100%)

The responses are an alarming sign of municipalities wrestling to implement gender equality measures. The respondents indicated the following challenges to achieve absolute gender mainstreaming in local decision-making processes: women need capacity-building in terms of further studies; government-of-the-day mandate regarding 50% quota system in political structures requires political will to implement; lack of lobbying for women councillors; retention of women councillors; lack of women caucus participation in the capacity-building programmes; lack of initiative by political parties to recruit more women; and lack of implementation of Employment Equity Plans in [most of the] municipalities.

Another set of structured questionnaires was distributed to a group of municipal office-bearers during August 2013. This questionnaire was aimed to achieve professional understanding/opinions on gender-based issues which may exist in their respective municipalities. The planned short-course session was attended by only 10 participants. Their demography is reflected in table 9 below.

**Table 9: Demography: Questionnaire 02**

Name of the municipality	Female	Male	Total
City of Matlosana Local Municipality	2	1	3
Kagisano-Molopo Local Municipality	1	0	1
Matjhabeng Local Municipality	2	0	2
Bojanala Platinum District Municipality	1	0	1
Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati District Municipality	2	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>

The demography of the respondents again shows a positive attitude towards the improved number of participation by women, supporting the empowerment approach. The gender-unbiased responses are reflected in table 10 below.

**Table 10: Responses-Questionnaire 02**

Themes	Responses		Total
	Yes	No	
The municipality has gender-based laws	9	1	10 (100%)
Women councillors participate in the policy-formulation process	10	0	10 (100%)
There is no ego conflict between men and women councillors	7	3	10 (100%)
It is acceptable for a woman to hold a political position	9	1	10 (100%)
Men are supportive towards women political leadership	7	3	10 (100%)
There is a gender equality framework applicable at the workplace	10	0	10 (100%)



The responses reveal that the stereo-type mentality that women may not dominate men in society still exists. This mentality results in ego-conflict and lack of support from the male counterparts at the workplace. Although municipalities have gender equality framework and gender-based laws, there is still a need for society to transform their thinking, attitudes and thought patterns towards accommodating women in strategic/political/leadership positions. Women need to be accepted as “empowering agents” utilizing their merit-based capabilities complemented with nurturing skills for development.

### THE WAY FORWARD

In order to bring gender equality (moreover improve the status of women) in political context (local elections) and policy context (Integrated Development Plan), the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) in collaboration with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) hosted a discussion session on 15 April 2011. The objectives of the discussions were established as (Commission for Gender Equality, 2011): “to secure political parties’ commitment to promoting gender equality and enhancing the status of women; to highlight CGE research findings relating to such commitment, in the form of the gender mainstreaming of manifestos, and gender analysis of electoral lists; to highlight CGE research findings related to municipal gender mainstreaming of Integrated Development Plans, and implementation of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA’s) 2007 national gender policy; to debate with stakeholders on this evidence of political and practical commitment to and implementation of gender equality at the local level; to highlight the Electoral Code of Conduct provisions relating to women’s free and full participation in political and election processes, and secure parties’ commitment to uphold these, and to foreground and challenge the institutional culture and practice within political parties themselves, and the extent to which parties are committed to ensuring an enabling environment for women’s full political participation” (p.1).

The implementation level and the impact of the set objectives is a matter of further research that requires analytical investigation in the forthcoming years.

The article also explores that a number of reasons are advanced for the equal representation of women at the local level, as stated by Ballington (2001): “firstly, a number of international and regional treaties and conventions require SADC states to achieve gender equality and representivity at all levels of government and decision-making bodies...[.] Secondly...it is therefore important that women are elected to influence policy at the local level...Inclusion and effective participation is, therefore, necessary to address the subordination and marginalization of women, and to ensure that the needs of women are met in the consolidation of local governance in Southern Africa (p.1). In order to further enhance the women representation and presentation at local governance, the Independent Electoral Commission needs to provide civic education and governance training to women candidates for local government elections. There should be “the combined efforts of the gender machinery, the supportive programmes, and the provincial departments, to each and collectively design strategies that deal with the difficulties of those municipal contexts. This may sound generally relevant to development practice, but it has real implications for gender relations and for women’s empowerment and active participation in particular” (Sithole *et al.*, 2012: 37). The article leaves the scope for future debates and discussions emphasizing the significance of the empowerment approach for women that signifies, “the process by which women redefine and extend what is possible for them to be and do in situations where they have been restricted, compared to men, from being and doing” (Mosedale, p. 252).

The article proposes a model for improvement called Gender-Based Municipal Assessment Tool (GB-MAT), (refer to Figure 1). The model highlights the significant elements that require vital consideration to realize the empowerment approach. There is an ineffective implementation<sup>ii</sup> of gender-responsive evaluation for gender mainstreaming, women representation in women caucus, women participation in policy-making processes, and gender equality in gender-based policies/laws in the municipalities in South Africa. At the institutional level, the GB-MAT assesses the organizational structures and development plans, emphasizing “what do we deliver?” The concern requires vital consideration of whether the community needs are covered by the municipal development plans. This assessment assists the strategic policy-makers and decision-makers to identify the gender-based challenges in the implementation of pro-poor strategies. The GB-MAT thereafter measures the impact (positive/negative) by identifying the gaps in delegated tasks<sup>iii</sup>. A gap is an impediment in the municipality structure with regard to the implementation of service delivery mechanisms. At the institutional level, the gap analysis indicates that gender equality with the highest score of 270 points; followed by participation by women with 196 points; thereafter women representation by 156, and gender mainstreaming by 120 points. Data obtained from a needs analysis/ social impact assessment (at community level), and capability analysis (at municipal level) need to be identified, analysed, interpreted and reported for continuous improvement in the system.





## CONCLUSION

South African Government has undertaken measures to establish national government initiatives to address gender issues, viz. the 1998 *National Action Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (NAP)* that deals with the political rights of women. The NAP is the outcome of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action 1993. South Africa, in 1995, signed and ratified CEDAW followed by the establishment of the *Commission on Gender Equality* that is an integral part of the *National Machinery for Gender Equality* (to develop and conduct educational programmes, evaluate bills related to the status of women, and consider suggestions and recommendations concerning the promotion of gender equality); and the *Office on the Status of Women* (to advance the national policy on gender equality, to conduct research on gender issues, and responsible for effective implementation of gender policies and programmes at the national, provincial and local spheres of government). The Office of the Status of Women developed a *National Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality* was adopted in 2000 in order to strengthen the voices of women in the political decision-making at all the three spheres of government. It further stresses on the need to establish a local government machinery to advance empowerment of women and gender equality.

The *Women's Caucus of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA)* in partnership with the Department of Provincial Affairs and Local Government (DPLG) adopted the *Benoni Declaration 2005* that stressed the need to formulate and implement strategies to enhance women representation and participation in local government.

In terms of legislation, the *Local Government White Paper 1998*, with reference to gender, states that "local government is uniquely placed to analyze and understand power dynamics within a community, and ensure that those who tend to be excluded and marginalized can become active and equal participants in community and the transformation of the settlements where they live". Under the concept of "Developmental Local Government", the White Paper accepts that "there are many obstacles to the equal and effective participation of women, such as social values and norms, as well as practical issues such as the lack of transport, household responsibilities, personal safety, etc." and, therefore, seeks the strategies to enhance women participation at the local government level. The *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act 1998*, under section 73 (3) (a) (i) suggests the need of procedural rules for women to be equitably represented on ward committees, which is significant because these committees inform their councilors as to what the most pressing needs of the community are. The *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 2000*, under section 17 (3) (c) stresses that when establishing the mechanisms, processes and procedures of community participation, the special needs of women must be taken into account.

Epilogue: There are legislative measures in place, however, based on the literature review, evaluation of official reports, and available MDG Reports, the article infers that there are various challenges which persist in the South African scenario with regard to gender equality at the local decision-making level. These include, *inter alia*, lack of data, methodology and indicators for monitoring progress; lack of adequate research for making informed decisions; lack of financial and human resources in order to implement women empowerment activities; laws and practices that discriminate women; etc. These challenges demand government to gender-mainstream the capacity-building initiatives and promote gender-based empowerment through participation and representation at the municipal political decision-making levels. This could be a significant effort for women to contribute and utilize their capabilities for community development. The article leaves the scope for future debate in the field of gender-based political empowerment at the South African municipal level.

GENDER-BASED MUNICIPAL ASSESSMENT TOOL (GB-MAT)										
<p><b>Notes:</b></p> <p><i>A gap is an impediment within the municipality structure to the implementation of service delivery.</i></p> <p><i>Community needs are basic elements of service as prioritised by the community itself.</i></p> <p><i>Weighting :</i></p> <p><i>1. is the level of urgency by the community (highest 10;lowest 0)</i></p> <p><i>2. is the level of capability of the municipality (highest 10;lowest 0)</i></p>		<b>Community Needs</b>								
		gender mainstreaming 	women representation 	women participation 	gender equality 					
community weighting on priority items		5	6	7	9					
<b>Municipalities' Capabilities</b>										
<b>Institutional</b>	<b>{what do we deliver?}</b>		<b>Score out of 10</b>							
	gender-based evaluation	weight	2	5	3	6	3	7	3	7
	women caucus		2	5	3	6	3	6	2	8
	policy-making processes		3	7	3	6	3	7	2	8
	gender-based policies/laws		3	7	2	8	2	8	3	7
<b>GAP ANALYSIS</b>		GAP Sum			24	26	28		30	
		score			(weight x GAP sum)	120	156	196		270
<p><b>Commentary: gender equality lacks Institutional support with the highest score of 270 points; followed by women participation with 196 points; thereafter women representation by 156 and gender mainstreaming by 120 points.</b></p>										

**Figure 1: Gender-Based Municipal Assessment Tool (GB-MAT)**

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<sup>i</sup> MDG 3 deals with gender equality and women empowerment.

<sup>ii</sup> The questions raised in the questionnaire are categorized into four main themes in the GB-MAT, viz. gender mainstreaming, women representation, women participation, and gender equality.

<sup>iii</sup> The GB-MAT tool indicates weighting that is the level of urgency by the community (highest: 10; lowest 0).

\* The weightings stated in the model and explanation, are hypothetical. This proposed model suggest that weighting can differ based on the municipal community survey, performed at any given time and place.