

# Chapter 1

## Introduction



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### Key points

- The Commonwealth Charter recognises gender equality as an essential component of basic human rights and human development.
- Commonwealth Africa has recorded the greatest increase in the levels of women's representation in parliament: from 19.0 per cent in 2004 to 26.6 per cent in 2016, a variance of 7.6 percentage points.
- Women lead 53 of the 193 parliaments globally; 19 of these are Commonwealth countries.
- Research indicates that there is growing demand for democracy in Africa – even more reason why both halves of the population must be equally represented in governance processes and decision-making.
- Post-elections, ministerial appointments present a 'quick win' for gender equality in political decision-making. They are also a litmus test for political will and commitment to gender equality.
- There are significant disparities between Commonwealth African countries regarding women's representation in parliament and local government.



The Commonwealth Charter not only promotes human rights, it also commits governments to eliminating 'all forms of discrimination, whether rooted in gender, race, colour, creed, political belief or other grounds' (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013). Gender equality and women's empowerment, in particular, are recognised as essential components of human development and basic human rights. Yet nowhere, says the report of the United Nations (UN) to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, 'is the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* equality among men and women greater than in the area of decision-making' (UN 1995, p.12).

This fact rings true today, despite progress. The 2016 World Economic Forum (WEF) *Gender Gap Report* (WEF 2016) noted that, while the gender gap in political participation was the widest that year, it exhibited the most progress, narrowing by 9 per cent since 2006. According to the WEF, on the 2016 trends, it could be closed within 82 years. In effect, although women remain under-represented in political decision-making, the statistics generally point to incremental progress and opportunity to build on gains achieved.

This chapter of the handbook explains why gender is a key issue in elections. It provides key facts – where women are (or are missing) in parliament, local government, cabinet and the top leadership of their countries. The chapter analyses why women are absent, and what can be done overall to promote more inclusive approaches, drawing from the insights shared by high-profile women in Commonwealth Africa.

## 1.1 Why gender-inclusive elections matter

Democracy is about the fair representation of all interest groups in society. The fact that women are not represented in proportion to their presence in the population is a violation of this principle. In short, women have a right to equal participation in political decision-making.

But democracy is not just about representation. It is also about participation and citizenship, which give people a say in their lives, making for better policies and service delivery, and holding those who make such decisions and take such actions more accountable.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) maintains that democracy will only assume true and dynamic significance when women and men participate equally in policy formulation and in national legislatures, reflecting the interests and aptitudes of both halves of the population (IPU 1994).

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 states: ‘Women’s equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy, but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be considered. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more

### Box 1.1 African women struggle for political space

‘In Uganda and many post-colonial African countries, women’s political leadership has come a long way. At independence, while the continent celebrated the great milestones from Ghana to Kenya, Uganda to Malawi, women were quietly bracing themselves for the second independence – the struggle for a woman’s space in political life of post-colonial Africa.

Most independence struggles always highlighted men at the forefront, at the expense of women’s contributions. Women’s achievements were not as revered as those of the men who led militaristic struggles. Many decades later, Africa now has two female heads of state and many other women occupy key decision-making positions. Even with these achievements, many analysts believe that women’s involvement in post-colonial state governance has been painfully slow.’

*Hon. Rebecca Kadaga (MP), first woman Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda, January 2017*

accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning’ (UN 1995, para 181).

The BPFA called on governments to take measures to ensure women’s equal access to, and full participation in, decision-making by creating a gender balance in government and administration; integrating women into political parties; increasing women’s capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership; and increasing women’s participation in the electoral process and political activities.

Research on the qualitative difference that women bring to decision-making is still in its infancy. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), a Swedish-based research institute, drew attention to this gap in the book *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*. The authors point out that:

*Although women remain significantly under-represented in today’s parliaments, women are now looking beyond numbers to focus on what they can actually do while in parliament – how they can make an impact, whatever their numbers may be. They are learning the rules of the game and using the knowledge and understanding to promote women’s issues and concerns from inside the world’s legislatures. In so doing, they are not only increasing the chances of their success, but they are also paving the way for a new generation of women to enter the legislative process (Karam 1998, p.125).*

The book carries findings from a research study in Norway that involved tracking legislation as well as interviews with male and female Members of Parliament (MPs). The study concluded that: ‘In Norwegian politics, there is unquestionably a mandate of difference attached to women politicians’ (Skjeie 1998, pp.183–189).

Over the past two decades, Africa has been in the grip of major social, economic and political change. Following the ‘lost decade’ of the 1980s, when a combination of stumbling commodity prices, conflict, war,

### **Box 1.2 Women and the 2030 Agenda**

‘For Tanzania, gender equality and women’s economic empowerment underlie the true spirit of the 2030 Agenda and are inextricably linked to our vision of inclusive and sustainable industrial development. Tanzania recognises that everyone should benefit from the national cake and that property should be equally shared among women and in all regions of the country. Great progress has been made but we are not there yet.’

*HE Samia Suluhu Hassan, Vice President, United Republic of Tanzania*

political instability and mismanagement led to major economic decline, the continent is slowly but surely on an upward trajectory. The pillars of ‘good governance’ are now generally agreed to include: the responsibility of the government (that is, the executive and its administration) to manage; the role of the judiciary, statutory bodies, the media and civil society to provide checks and balances; and the role of the private sector, working in a conducive macroeconomic environment, to create wealth and jobs.

The hallmarks of ‘good governance’ are accountability, transparency, openness and the rule of law. There are two dimensions of governance:

- economic and corporate governance, to attract increased investment, improve efficiency and productivity, and reduce poverty through macroeconomic management, public financial management, banking supervision, financial services regulation and corporate governance; and
- political governance that includes ‘political pluralism, allowing for the existence of several political parties and workers’ unions, and fair, open and democratic elections periodically organised to enable people to choose their leaders freely’ (New Partnership for Africa’s Development website).

Within the above context, elections are generally regarded as one of the hallmarks of democracy. An Afrobarometer report released in November 2016 found a direct correlation between the quality of elections and the demand for democracy in 36 African countries surveyed: African countries with high-quality elections are more likely to register increases in popular demand for democracy than countries with low-quality elections, the report indicates.

The report’s findings that ‘popular demand for democracy still exceeds citizen perceptions of the available supply of democracy in most African countries (26 out of 36 in 2015)’ augurs well for the future of elections in Africa, as the preferred mode for Africans to select their leaders. This is even more reason why women and men must participate equitably in this governance-defining process. It also underscores the need for constant scrutiny and strengthening of institutions that play a role in the process to enhance inclusivity (Afrobarometer 2016).

Numerous Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) reports have highlighted the under-representation of women in elections and electoral process. It is quite telling that the Afrobarometer survey finds a gender gap even in the demand for democracy across the continent, with women (39 per cent) significantly less likely to demand democracy than men (49 per cent).

This under-representation, and incidents of apathy towards participation, is reflected in the gender gap in decision-making positions within the

legislature and the executive. Yet, as earlier illustrated, emerging hard evidence affirms that women's participation in decision-making policies translates into increased gender equality policies and reforms in areas like family law and land rights (African Development Bank 2015).

## 1.2 Women in Commonwealth African parliaments

Since the introduction of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality (PoA) in 2005, Commonwealth member countries have made important strides in increasing the number of female parliamentarians within its six official regions. The PoA target of 30 per cent or more women in decision-making in parliament and local government has been achieved through the introduction of affirmative action measures such as temporary special measures (TSMs) and reserved seats in some Commonwealth countries.

As reflected in Table 1.1, which compares the proportion of women in parliament in the different regions of the Commonwealth from 2004 to 2016, the overall proportion for all Commonwealth regions in 2016 is 21.1 per cent, close to the global average of 22.7 per cent. This represents a 4.3 percentage point increase on 2004. The Americas region currently has the highest proportion of women in parliament, at 31.2 per cent (a 6.8 percentage point increase compared to 2004). At 14.5 per cent, Asia has the lowest proportion of women in parliament in the Commonwealth.

Commonwealth Africa has recorded the greatest increase in the levels of women's representation in parliament: from 19.0 per cent in 2004 to 26.6 per cent in 2016, a variance of 7.6 percentage points (Morna et al. 2013). The 2015 Ibrahim Index on African Governance (IIAG), which includes a 'women in politics' indicator, further affirms that the majority of African countries (37) have improved in the gender subcategory.

**Table 1.1 Women in parliament in the Commonwealth by region (2016)**

| Region        | 2004 (%) | 2016 (%) | Variance (%) |
|---------------|----------|----------|--------------|
| The Americas  | 24.4%    | 31.2%    | 6.8%         |
| Africa        | 19.0%    | 26.6%    | 7.6%         |
| Europe        | 17.5%    | 21.7%    | 4.3%         |
| The Caribbean | 19.7%    | 24.2%    | 4.5%         |
| South Pacific | 14.9%    | 16.3%    | 1.4%         |
| Asia          | 10.8%    | 14.5%    | 3.7%         |
| Overall       | 16.8%    | 21.1%    | 4.3%         |

Source: Morna et al. (2013)

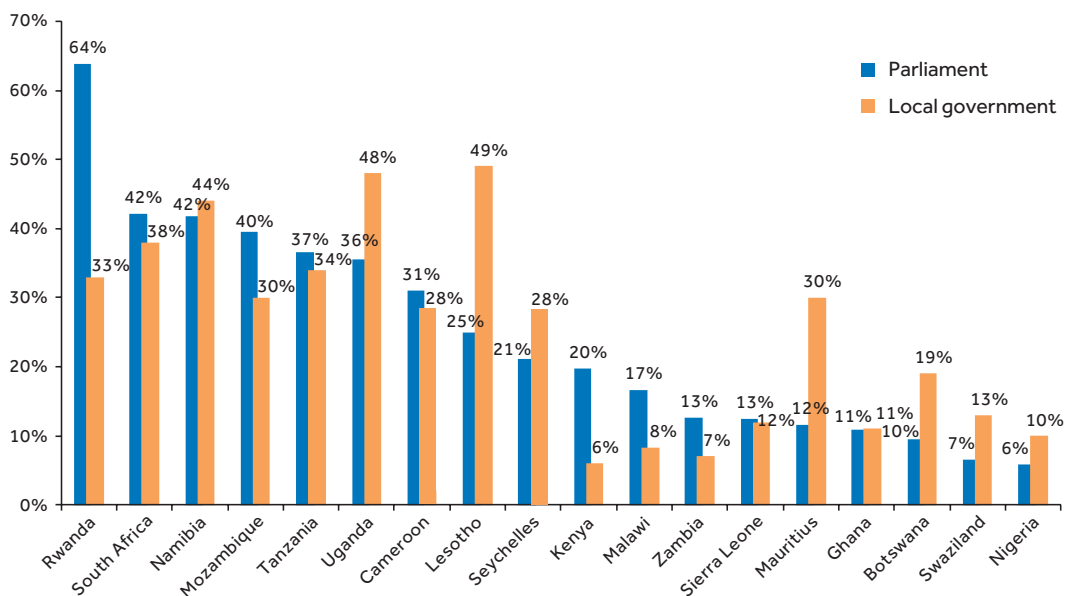
### Box 1.3 Scandinavia is no longer the model

'Before Rwanda came onto the scene, Scandinavian countries consistently topped the world in terms of women's numbers in public elective office. Even now, Scandinavia as a region still tops the world. How did women in Scandinavia come this far? Answers to this question have been found in the reality of structural changes within these countries, which include secularisation, the strength of social democratic parties and the development of an extended welfare state, women's entrance into the labour market in large numbers in the 1960s, the educational boom of the 1960s, the electoral system (PR) [proportional representation], as well as the strength of women's organisations in raising the level of female representation. The Scandinavian experience took 80 years. Today, the women of the world are not willing to wait...'

*Ballington (2004)*

Notably, African countries comprise six of the top ten performers when it comes to the proportion of women in parliament in the Commonwealth. These top performers have either met or exceeded the 30 per cent minimum target for women in decision-making, recommended in 1996 at the 5th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting in Trinidad and Tobago. These gains have resulted from many actions, including electoral reforms, legislated and voluntary temporary special measures (TSMs), as well as advocacy and mobilisation by civil society actors, including women's movements.

**Figure 1.1 Women in parliament and local government in Commonwealth Africa in 2016**

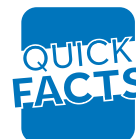


Source: Produced with data from Commonwealth Secretariat and IPU websites (accessed June 2017)



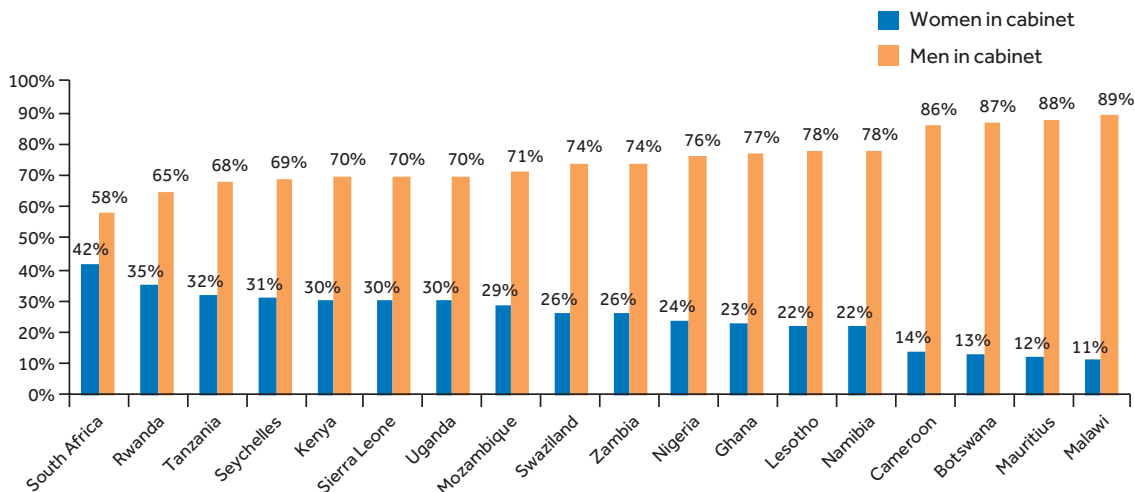
Figure 1.1 on women in parliament and local government in Commonwealth Africa in 2016 (in descending order, women in parliament) shows:

- There are huge disparities between Commonwealth African countries regarding women's representation in parliament and local government.
- At 64 per cent, Rwanda has the highest proportion of women in parliament in the world, the Commonwealth and Commonwealth Africa.
- Seven of the 18 Commonwealth African countries (Cameroon, Rwanda, South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda) have achieved a proportion of 30 per cent or more for women in parliament.
- Seven of the 18 Commonwealth Africa countries (Zambia, Sierra Leone, Mauritius, Ghana, Botswana, Swaziland and Nigeria) have a proportion of 15 per cent or lower for women in parliament.
- Lesotho (49 per cent) has the highest proportion of women in local government.
- Three Commonwealth African countries (Rwanda, Kenya and Malawi) have a significantly higher proportion of women in parliament than in local government. This reflects the conservative nature of these societies on the ground, where forces of custom, culture and tradition remain stronger than at the national level.
- Four Commonwealth African countries have a significantly higher proportion of women in local government than in parliament (Uganda, Lesotho, Mauritius and Botswana). Except for Botswana, this reflects the fact that where Commonwealth African countries have been willing to adopt TSMs (see Chapter 4) they have been more willing to do so at the local level (often seen as 'community affairs' rather than 'real politics') than at the national level.
- Four Commonwealth African countries (South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique and Tanzania) have high levels of women's representation in parliament and at the local level.
- Three Commonwealth African countries (Ghana, Swaziland and Nigeria) have low levels of women's representation in both parliament and at the local government.



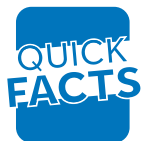
### 1.3 Ministerial level

As ministers are appointed rather than elected, they are outside the scope of this handbook. However, because they are appointed, ministers are a litmus test of political will. This is one area in which Heads of State who are committed to gender equality have the power to bring about change in a relatively short time span.

**Figure 1.2 Women and men in cabinet in Commonwealth Africa**

Source: Commonwealth Secretariat and government websites (accessed in June 2017)

Figure 1.2 (in descending order, women in cabinet) shows that:

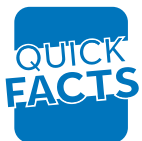


- The proportion of women in Commonwealth African cabinets ranges from 11 per cent in Malawi to 42 per cent in South Africa.
- There is no direct correlation between levels of women in parliament and cabinet. For example, at 35 per cent, Rwanda has a much lower proportion of women in cabinet than in parliament (64 per cent).
- Conversely, there are countries that have a low proportion of women in parliament but a much higher proportion in cabinet. Examples include Kenya (30 per cent in cabinet versus 20 per cent in parliament), Sierra Leone (30 per cent in cabinet versus 13 per cent in parliament) and Swaziland (26 per cent in cabinet versus 7 per cent in parliament).

## 1.4 Presiding officers of legislatures

Women lead 53 of the 193 parliaments globally; 19 of these are Commonwealth countries.

Table 1.2 shows that:



- Eight Commonwealth African countries (Botswana, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Swaziland, Tanzania, South Africa and Uganda) had female speakers as at mid-2017 when this handbook was written.
- Eight out of 18 countries amounts to 44 per cent Commonwealth African countries with women speakers.

**Table 1.2 Presiding officers or speakers in Commonwealth Africa in 2017**

| Country             | Name                  | Office         | Term of office |                           |
|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|
|                     |                       |                | From (year)    | To (year)                 |
| <b>PRESENT</b>      |                       |                |                |                           |
| <b>Botswana</b>     | Gladys Kokorwe        | Speaker        | 2014           | 2018                      |
| <b>Lesotho</b>      | Ntlhoi Motsamai       | Speaker        | 2012           | 2020                      |
| <b>Mauritius</b>    | Santi Bai Hanoomanjee | Speaker        | 2014           | 2019                      |
| <b>Mozambique</b>   | Veronica Macamo       | Speaker        | 2010           | 2020                      |
| <b>Rwanda</b>       | Donatille Mukabalisa  | Speaker        | 2013           | 2018                      |
| <b>South Africa</b> | Baleka Mbete          | Speaker        | 2014           | 2018                      |
| <b>Tanzania</b>     | Tulia M Ackson        | Deputy Speaker | 2015           | 2020                      |
| <b>Uganda</b>       | Rebecca Kadaga        | Speaker        | 2011           | Incumbent as at July 2017 |
| <b>PAST</b>         |                       |                |                |                           |
| <b>Swaziland</b>    | Esther Dlamini        | Deputy Speaker | 2013           | 2016                      |
| <b>Tanzania</b>     | Anne Makinda          | Speaker        | 2010           | 2015                      |

Source: IPU (2017)

- The eight is more than double the three women speakers in the past (Uganda, Swaziland and Tanzania). Rebecca Kadaga currently serves as the first woman speaker in Uganda.

## 1.5 Heads of State/Government

Being Head of State is the pinnacle of achievement in politics. Generally, this is an elected position, and it requires a high degree of backing from the individual's party. Women are slowly reaching for the top. Several countries – Uganda, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria and Zambia – have had women (albeit few and on the margins) participate in the race for the presidency.

In the 2015 elections in Nigeria, women comprised two out of the fourteen presidential candidates, although one did not make it through the party nomination level.

COG reports show a growing number of women presidential running mates and therefore vice-presidential candidates. This trend is not limited to the larger parties, but also occurs in smaller parties. In Malawi's 2014 tripartite elections, women comprised two out of twelve presidential candidates and two running mates. In Ghana's 2012 election, women comprised three of the eight running mates. In Nigeria, the 2015 presidential race had four female vice-presidential candidates.

### Case study 1.1 Reflections from Uganda



'In the past, Uganda has had a female vice president and I served as the first-ever female Speaker of Parliament. Many may be quick to highlight this as a great success, but the fact that it came 50 years after independence speaks volumes of the struggle of women to make it in the political arena.

On a personal level, I joined politics fully in 1989 as a Member of Parliament representing Kamuli District women. At that time, I was coming from a background of private practice as a lawyer. My venture into politics was driven by a passion for women's emancipation and empowerment – I felt that it was my duty to join politics and influence decision-making for the improvement of lives of women in Kamuli district in particular and Uganda in general.

A new constitution was enacted in 1995 with gender-related provisions. The country holds presidential, parliamentary and local government elections every five years. Uganda also conforms to the articles of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which promotes the equal participation of women in public life.

Fortunately, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government had just introduced seats for women representatives and this provided me with a perfect platform to make my thrust into politics. This is what is commonly referred to as "affirmative action", which was also later integrated into the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda in 1995.

Of course, joining politics at that time was not easy for me as a woman. There were and there still remain so many prejudices and odds against women in politics in Uganda. But somehow I was able to ride the tide and overcome. Being a lawyer who knew her rights and being strong willed of course helped. But most important was the overwhelming support of the people of Kamuli district.

My political party, the NRM, of which I am second National Vice-Chairperson, has been instrumental in my journey in politics. As I have mentioned earlier, it's the NRM that created the opportunity for women through introducing affirmative action. The same party has been supportive through all the levels and strata that I have been climbing.

In Uganda, the Electoral Commission is the body in charge of conducting elections. The electoral laws in Uganda allow and enable women's political participation. However, under the Elections Act Cap, there is no special provision for the protection of women during electoral processes and this has been one of the factors that really hinders the participation of women in electoral processes in Uganda. Violence against women during campaigns and elections are still a deterrent factor towards the participation of women in electoral processes.

As women leaders, we have done our best to push for the emancipation of women in Uganda. We have struggled to build and advocate for structures right from the grassroots to the top levels. We have also put in place legislation which, if well implemented, we think can protect women's rights as well as create equal opportunities.

There are still challenges. For example, the numbers that we have in parliament are not ideal. Currently, women in parliament in Uganda are just over 31 per cent, which is far off the 50 per cent target. Unfortunately, this is not the case with Uganda alone but also with many other countries, because only two countries have achieved gender parity globally. We need to focus on empowering women through policy reforms, through education, through changing attitudes and trends in our societies. We need increased funding for women in our parties, we need to create more women advocacy groups at the grassroots level to push the agenda.'

*Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga (MP), first woman Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda, January 2017*

**Box 1.4 The Commonwealth leads the way**

The Commonwealth's first female Chair-in-Office, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, led a high-level meeting with female world leaders entitled 'Women's Political Participation' as a side event to the 66th UN General Assembly (UNGA) Session in New York on 19 September 2011, in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat and UN Women. Dignitaries in attendance included the former US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, the former Head of UN Women, Michele Bachelet, and five female presidents and Heads of Government at the time. The resulting Joint Statement signed by female world leaders resulted in the adoption of the UNGA Resolution 66/130 on 19 December 2011.

*Commonwealth Secretariat (2012)*

Countries whose electoral laws provide for a running mate for the presidency may have a higher chance of bringing women closer to the top and this incremental presence will, in the long run, provide opportunities for women to demonstrate the ability to govern. Although institutionalised deputyship for women is not a desirable phenomenon, more women running at this level can have the potential to normalise their presence at the top.

In some instances, the election of the male standard-bearer as president produced a moment of history for the female vice-president:

- Dr Wandira Specioza Kazibwe of Uganda became Africa's first and longest-serving female executive vice-president, a role she held for ten years (1993–2003).
- Joyce Banda of Malawi became the first female vice-president in Malawian history. With the demise of President Mutharika, she became her country's first female president.

In Tanzania, two women were selected by the ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) as two of the three finalists to be considered as presidential candidate in the 2016 elections. Mr Magufuli was elected as CCM's standard-bearer and he chose Samia Hassan as his vice-presidential running mate. She is currently serving as the first female vice-president of Tanzania.

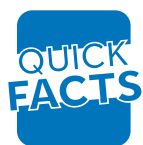
The year 2012 marked a high point in the Commonwealth for women holding the office of Head of State and/or Head of Government. Globally, 20 out of 193 Heads of State were women; seven of these were from Commonwealth member countries. In addition to President Banda of Malawi in Commonwealth Africa, President Monique Ohsan-Bellepeau of Mauritius was also serving as Head of State (Commonwealth Secretariat 2012). By 2017, this number had dropped to five women leaders from Commonwealth countries: Prime Ministers Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh,

**Table 1.3 Women in Commonwealth Africa in top roles in 2016**

| Country             | Head of Government / vice-president        | Title            |
|---------------------|--|------------------|
| <b>PRESENT</b>      |  |                  |
| <b>Mauritius</b>    | Ameenah Gurib-Fakim (2015–)                | President        |
| <b>Namibia</b>      | Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila (2015–)         | Prime Minister   |
| <b>Tanzania</b>     | Samia Hassan Suluhu (2015–)                | Vice President   |
| <b>Zambia</b>       | Inonge Mutukwa Wina (2015–)                | Vice President   |
| <b>PAST</b>         |  |                  |
| <b>Malawi</b>       | Joyce Banda (2012–14)                      | President        |
| <b>Malawi</b>       | Joyce Banda (2009–12)                      | Vice President   |
| <b>Mauritius</b>    | Agnès Monique Ohsan Bellepeau (2012; 2015) | President        |
| <b>Mauritius</b>    | Agnès Monique Ohsan Bellepeau (2010–16)    | Vice President   |
| <b>Mozambique</b>   | Luisa Diogo, (2004–10)                     | Prime Minister   |
| <b>South Africa</b> | Baleka Mbete, (2008–09)                    | Deputy President |
| <b>South Africa</b> | Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, (2005–08)          | Deputy President |
| <b>Uganda</b>       | Dr Wandira Specioza Kazibwe, (1994–2003)   | Deputy President |

Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila of Namibia and Theresa May of the UK, and Presidents Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca of Malta and Ameenah Gurib-Fakim of Mauritius.

Table 1.3 shows that:



- Commonwealth Africa has had five women deputy/vice-presidents, one prime minister and one president in the past.
- In 2009, Joyce Banda was elected as first female vice-president to President Mutharika of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Malawi. She assumed the presidency after he died of heart attack in 2012, becoming the first female president in Malawi's history. This was relatively short lived (two years, from 2012 to 2014).
- At the time of writing (2017), Commonwealth Africa has two women vice-presidents (Tanzania and Zambia), a woman prime minister (Namibia) and a woman president (Mauritius).
- Mauritius is the only country in Commonwealth Africa to have had two women serving as presidents.

## 1.6 What keeps women out of politics?

UN General Assembly Resolution 66/130 on Women and Political Participation, adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2011, expressed a serious concern 'that women in every part of the world continue

to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women.<sup>7</sup>

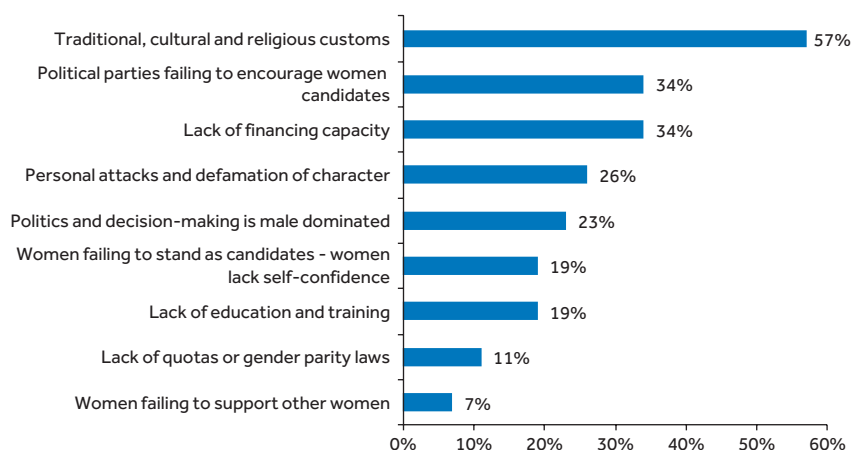
The Commonwealth's *Election Management: A Compendium of Commonwealth Good Practice* (Commonwealth Secretariat 2016b) flags another critical dimension: clear tensions between the promotion of women's political participation as an essential component of human rights, and attitudes to the freedom of women to express political views, particularly when those views clash with those of their family or community.

The graph at Figure 1.3 highlights some of the common barriers to women's active participation in politics across the Commonwealth, as gleaned from a survey of the 'referees' who conduct elections – election management bodies (EMBs).<sup>1</sup>

Traditional, religious and cultural factors (57 per cent) invariably top the list of explanations for the under-representation of women in political decision-making. These range from arguments that women are 'unsuited' to decision-making and are their own worst enemies to the gender roles that define what women and men do, effectively excluding women from decision-making.

A socialisation version of the argument is that women have been brought up to regard politics as alien. Their lives and activities have always directed

**Figure 1.3 Barriers to women's political participation in Commonwealth Africa**



**Source:** Survey conducted during the 2016 Commonwealth Electoral Network (CEN) Biennial Conference

**Note:** Data also reflects other regions of the Commonwealth

them away from activities of power. It is also argued that: ‘Women often face a double day, balancing career and family responsibilities, thus limiting their opportunities for career advancement’ (Beckman and D’Amico 1994, p.76).

According to this view, it is not simply the case that women lack the will and attributes to participate in decision-making, but also they are systematically discriminated against by men in authority who pass over them when it comes to promotion; by legislation, which limits their opportunities; and sometimes by a hostile media, which hounds or ridicules women who dare to venture into the political sphere.

Such a society, it is argued, is patriarchal. It accords men the dominant role and the status of decision-makers in both the private sphere (home) and the public sphere (society). It banishes women to the private sphere of home-keeping and limits them to reproductive services in the public sphere. Thus, a society can be called democratic and yet be completely patriarchal (see also: Molyneux 1984; Phillips 1991). In her contribution to the handbook, the vice-president of Tanzania reflects on this challenge (see case study 1.2, below)

### **Case study 1.2 Political experience from the vice-president of Tanzania**



‘My political road to being elected as a member of the House of the Representatives of Zanzibar had no hurdles whatsoever, because of the creation of the window of special seats for women.

For most women, this may not be the case due to various reasons such as cultural setbacks, low level of education and entrenched poverty, in the case of rural women. Other probable challenges arise from the political dynamics of some communities, electoral systems, intra-party procedures and issues of corruption.

My path was smoother because of my level of education, my cultural background, which was free of harmful practices, my professional experience and various training on election procedures and campaign techniques I had benefited from. Consequently, I did not face major challenges in my first election through special seats.

However, I encountered challenges in 2010 when I joined the race to contest for Makunduchi constituency on an equal footing with men. I was the only woman candidate out of the nine contestants. During the intra-party selection of candidates for the general election, I had put up with insults and being scandalised by my eight male competitors, who oozed misogynistic and chauvinistic behaviours. Despite all these challenges, I sailed through and was selected as the party flag bearer for Makunduchi constituency.

I managed to “break the glass ceiling” by adopting a strategy to work closely with fellow women. My motto was – “A scandal falsely directed at a woman candidate at any level is a scandal falsely directed at all women in the constituency”.

*HE Samia Suluhu Hassan, Vice-President, United Republic of Tanzania*



The second and third barriers to women's political participation (34 per cent each) cited by the EMBs are **lack of support from parties** and the **increasing monetisation of politics** in elections, an issue highlighted by a significant number of COG reports, more recently in Uganda in 2015, and further recorded in a publication co-ordinated by several women's NGO groups in Uganda (Uganda Women's Network et al. 2016). Women appear to be suffering disproportionately from the huge financial burden that comes with contesting elections. The less favourable financial status of women affects their participation in two ways: first, their ability to fund their political campaigns; and second, their ability to meet candidate nomination/registration fees set by the party ahead of primaries and then at the level of the EMB.

The fourth barrier (26 per cent), from the perspective of our EMBs, is **'personal attacks and defamation of character'**. This opens up the less-discussed yet cross-cutting topic of violence against women in politics (VAWP), and in the subcategory of elections (VAWE).

**Violence against women** in politics is a major deterrent to the entry and retention of women in politics. Women in politics are sometimes portrayed as being morally loose; they face sexual harassment and other threats. Young unmarried women are especially susceptible to such threats. Some women who aspire to go into politics may face violence from their own parties and opposition candidates. In some cases, women often must hire their own security; this adds to the costs of campaigning.

**Lack of education and training** (19 per cent) is a barrier, which makes the case for capacity-building of female political candidates. Beyond that, it raises the importance of girls' education.

Commenting on the introduction of the 'Grade 12 eligibility requirement or its equivalent' for candidates contesting at all levels in Zambia's 2016 elections, in its report, the COG noted that this eligibility requirement was a barrier for a number of people who would otherwise have been nominated as a candidate, particularly at the local government level. It was also noted that the education requirement disproportionately affected older women, who were less likely to have attained Grade 12 (secondary level or high

### **Box 1.5 Personal attacks deter women's political participation**

'I have had sexual propaganda against me from those who had wanted to demoralise me and throw me off from political engagement. It has been a psychological torture to tolerate such humiliation.'

*Hon. Zainab Athman Katimba of Tanzania*

**Box 1.6 Zambia: Educational qualification requirement excludes many women**

In addition to not having a quota, the new electoral legislation introduced in January 2016, six months before the elections, which required all candidates to possess a Grade 12 certificate to qualify to contest elections, resulted in many women candidates dropping out, according to Beauty Katebe, Board Chairperson, Zambia National Women's Lobby Group (ZNWL). 'This new law disqualified 95 per cent of the 630 women trained by ZNWL for the local government leadership for the previous three years. They could not qualify to contest elections, because they did not have the Grade 12 certificate. The ZNWL managed to lobby political parties to adopt other women to replace those that were disqualified and dropped out of the election race. However, there was no time to train the new women candidates in leadership skills.'

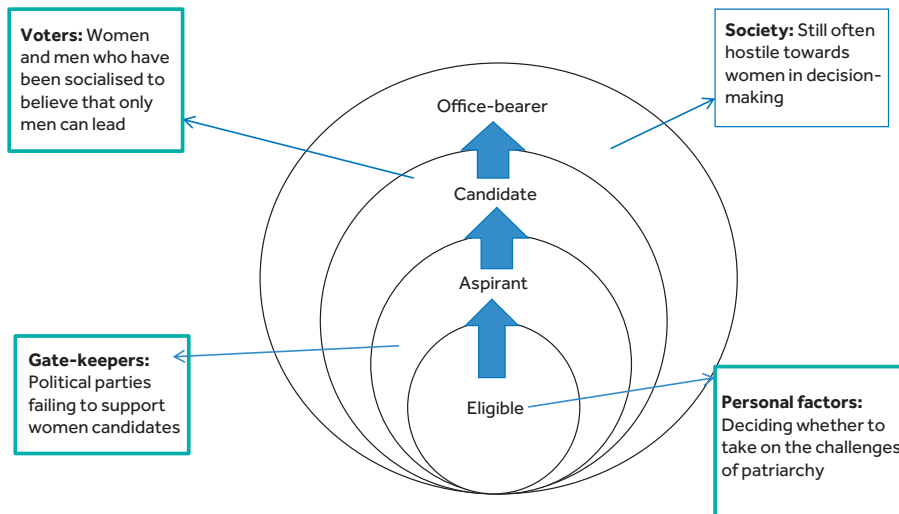
school education) owing to historical gender disparity in education access. However, the COG agreed with the opinion that, because the initiative sought to achieve a public good in the long term, its immediate negative short-term impact could have been mitigated by a gradual implementation.

Although EMBs rank lack of gender parity laws and TSMs quite low in the hierarchy of barriers (11 per cent), Chapter 4 of this handbook shows why and how these can be a crucial factor in opening doors to women.

## 1.7 Barriers to women's political participation across the electoral cycle

Barriers to women's political participation are intertwined and they extend across the whole election cycle, from the decision to stand to actually holding office. As illustrated in Figure 1.4, the first stage is for the individual to decide to stand for an elective office. Women tend to be constrained at the individual level in terms of ambition and requisite resources. Research conducted, particularly in the USA, has clearly demonstrated that women are less likely than men to think that they are qualified to run for office, to consider running or to seek high-level state and national positions if they do decide to run (Lawless and Fox 2012). There is a considerably lower proportion of eligible women standing for public office, relative to men. In other words, relatively fewer eligible women offer themselves for elective office. Oft-cited lack of confidence results in a gender gap in political ambition. The politics of this gender gap need to be adequately characterised to avoid us falling into the trap of equating the gap to some innate attributes of men and women, but rather to seek to understand the social and historical roots of political ambition differentials. This will ultimately point to the need for clear strategies for closing the gender gap in political ambition.

**Figure 1.4 Barriers to women's participation across the electoral cycle**



Source: Adapted from Matland (1998, p.67)

The second stage in political recruitment is that of gate-keepers, the political parties (or other mechanisms) that turn those who finally step forward, into candidates. Party rules and practices are therefore important in terms of how they either facilitate or hinder women from translating ambition into candidacy. Evidence shows that party practices either help or block women's full participation. The party leadership and nomination processes have an impact on the way female members of parties will engage in an election.

The final stage is that of voters, who then turn candidates into MPs or local government representatives. Challenges arise in contexts where there is a general tendency for voter preference for male candidates, as well as cultural negativity towards women.

The post-election period relates to what happens in the aftermath in terms of review and making recommendations for the next round of elections. Obstacles to women, especially in the electoral period, also relate to campaign financing, harassment and the reality of electoral violence. The categorisation of these stages in the recruitment process provides a clear framework for identification of concrete actions at each stage of the election cycle.

## 1.8 Keys to gender-inclusive elections

From the perspective of women as a group that has been historically excluded in structural terms, 'gender-inclusive elections' refers to a context

in which women have a right to be legitimate participants in the entire process – whether as voters, aspirants/candidates or actors in election management and party activists. The rules and practices must ensure that women and men have equitable opportunity and support in the entire electoral process, that is, during the pre-election, election and post-election periods. At the general level, inclusiveness points to the need to

**Table 1.4 Key state responsibilities and gender dimensions of each**

| State obligations during elections   | Gender dimensions   |
|--|---|
| Provide for the holding of legislative elections at regular intervals  | The handbook notes that the institutionalisation of periodic elections across the continent has increased the opportunity for women to access political office and has embedded their right to vote   |
| Establish a neutral, impartial mechanism for the management of legislative elections   | Gender-aware EMBs play a key role in preventing violence against women in elections (VAWE) and other barriers to participation by women in elections  |
| Establish an effective, impartial and non-discriminatory procedure for the registration of voters  | Gender-aware EMBs ensure that women are able to register as voters; and that voters receive gender-aware education and can exercise their choice freely   |
| Stipulate clear criteria for the registration of voters, <i>inter alia</i> age and citizenship   | There are often gender dimensions to citizenship, such as men married to nationals being denied citizenship   |
| Make regulations governing the formation, registration and functioning of political parties  | Political parties play a key role in either facilitating or inhibiting women's political participation  |
| Establish the conditions for competition in elections on an equitable basis  | Direct and indirect barriers to women's free and fair participation in elections need to be removed   |
| Provide for and regulate the funding of political parties and electoral campaigns to ensure the promotion of equality of opportunity     | Funding is a key barrier to women's participation; ensuring that funding is fairly distributed in an open and transparent manner, and that it does not supersede the issues in elections, is key to ensuring women's effective participation in elections |
| Ensure parties and candidates have equal access to state-owned media   | Persistent gender biases in the media (see Chapter 7) are a key barrier to women's participation; monitoring media fair play needs to include gender dimensions   |
| Ensure that voters have a free choice by maintaining the viability of political parties through public funding or free time in the media | This should include equal access, space and air time for women candidates   |
| Ensure through civic education that the electorate becomes familiar with electoral issues and procedures                                 | This should include the importance of women's participation in decision-making for the success of democracy   |

address the inhibitors in the electoral system and the entire spectrum of electoral practices, including the assurance of a violence-free process as election violence often discourages women from electoral participation. Table 1.4 summarises key state responsibilities in relation to elections, and the gender dimensions of each.

## 1.9 Checklist

### Barriers to women's political participation

- ✓ What are the key barriers to women's political participation? For example, traditional and cultural barriers, lack of education, lack of adequate financing and violence (especially gender-based violence).



## Notes

- 1 The survey comprised six questions. The first two provided a selection of potential answers for the respondents to choose from. The remaining four questions required a response based on the respondents' assessments. These responses were then categorised based on recurring themes and ideas identified in the answers provided. The 2016 CEN Biennial Conference was attended by 57 conference delegates from 39 participating EMBs and 26 delegates from 25 participating EMBs completed this survey. Of these, 11 respondents chose to declare their names, while the remaining 14 chose to complete the survey anonymously.

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