Chapter 6

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Key points

- Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a key role in promoting gender-inclusive elections.

- CSO advocacy tends to be episodic, partly influenced by resources. It is necessary to identify cost-effective means of tracking and keeping the advocacy publicly alive and enduring.

- Knowledge building is key: it produces evidence and creates a basis for public engagement. As part of civic engagement and advocacy, cutting-edge policy research should be conducted on a consistent basis.

- Lack of confidence is a by-product of the social system that diminishes women's ambition for political leadership. Part of the civic mobilisation around this should be to empower young women aspirants.

According to the Commonwealth Charter, responsibility for upholding and promoting a 'democratic culture' rests with governments, political parties and CSOs. This recognises that the ultimate goal of the constitutional order is to produce not only democratic procedures, but also a democratic 'culture': a culture in which all citizens – whatever their background – can participate and feel that they have a stake; and a culture in which unjust social privileges and oppressive hierarchies are tamed in the interests of social harmony and justice (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013).

The charter notes that 'the health and dynamism of civil society – that multitude of organisations, autonomous and semi-autonomous, formal and informal that lie between government and individual citizens and their families – is a significant indication of the quality of a country's democracy'. It urges CSOs and others to use the charter as a yardstick for evaluating the extent to which their governments, and the constitutional and legal framework under which they operate, meet the basic democratic and human rights standards of the Commonwealth.

Since the 1990s, there has been a proliferation of CSOs and women's rights organisations (WROs). These groups have helped shape the gender equality agenda in their countries. Through their advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns, they have sensitised fellow citizens to gender issues and created the momentum for necessary legislated and constitutional reforms. These

groups have also played a role in building the capacity of prospective candidates, serving as gender, media and election watchdogs, as well as helped mediate conflict in some instances. This chapter maps these diverse groups and the role they play in promoting inclusive elections.

6.1 Mapping CSOs and WROs in Commonwealth Africa

CSOs have been central to the promotion of citizens' rights, good electoral practices and demand for accountability and representation for minority groups. In recent years, gender and equal representation of women has become integral to their work.

West African Commonwealth countries have a variety of national and regional CSOs that have played an important role in elections. Sierra Leone, for example, has witnessed growth in the number of CSOs since the civil war. These CSOs have been part of the reconstruction process. WROs constitute about 6 per cent of all CSOs in Sierra Leone (Oppong et al. 2013).

Civil society has helped promote and advocate for free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria since 1999. There are strong CSOs founded by women and working towards promoting gender equality. They participate in the mobilisation of communities, especially women, during elections, using methods such as focus groups. For example, Women in Nigeria is a political interest organisation that aims at transforming class and gender relations, while Women in Law and Development (WILDAF) is an African network with a strong presence in Ghana.

CSOs also have a long history in East Africa. The Index of Philanthropic Freedom (Hudson Institute 2015) scored Tanzania highest in the East Africa region for affording space to civil society groups (Kwayu and Lipovsek 2010–2015). Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI), a network of East African WROs based in Uganda, led the campaign for an East African Gender Equality Act, and launched the first 'Gender Barometer' for the region in 2017. FEMNET, an African advocacy network that co-ordinates inputs by WROs into African and global agendas, is based in Nairobi, Kenya.

In Southern Africa, Women in Law Southern Africa, which has chapters in various countries, has long driven the women's rights agenda in this region. Gender Links, based in Johannesburg, with offices in ten Southern African countries, co-ordinates the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance, which campaigned for a subregional instrument for promoting gender equality that brings together global and African commitments in one binding instrument. Various organisations also promote women's political participation at

the national level. These include the Women in Politics Support Unit in Zimbabwe and the Zambia National Women's Lobby (ZNWL).

Challenges faced by CSOs include political interference, limited funding and management issues, as well as questions regarding credibility, competency and a non-evidence-driven approach. For instance, perceptions of corruption are high in Sierra Leone and affect CSO credibility. There have also been calls for CSOs to strengthen their internal management capacity to allow them to be more influential and credible in their work. Lack of social buy-in from the public is sometimes linked to perceptions of neutrality, while some CSOs have been accused of focusing on urban areas at the expense of the rural areas where most people live.

For CSOs working on gender and women's empowerment, patriarchal attitudes create direct and indirect barriers to progress. Women activists working in this field may face GBV, which can impede their work. Despite these challenges, CSOs play a crucial role in the gender and governance agenda. Specific areas of work and influence are summarised in the sections that follow.

6.2 Research and advocacy on TSMs

Gender Links, working with the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance and the EASSI, produced the first East Africa Barometer in 2017. This has played a crucial role in tracking the relationship between electoral systems and TSMs, making the case for 'special measures'. The Media Watch Organisation in Mauritius, which provides the focal network of the Southern African Gender Protocol Alliance there, is credited with successfully campaigning for the gender and local government quota adopted, despite much resistance to the idea of TSMs in 2013.

CSOs in Kenya were instrumental in pushing for the constitutional quota there. A coalition of civil society and human rights groups led by the Centre for Rights Education and Awareness brought a case concerning non-compliance with the constitution in the current parliament to the High Court (see Chapter 3).

The Zambia National Women's Lobby Group (ZNWL) has also been advocating for a more gender-responsive electoral system in the country. According to Board Chairperson, Beauty Katebe:

Election management bodies, political parties and legislature need to do more in supporting women's political participation. The election management body must continue ensuring that the participation of women in the electoral process as candidates and voters is equal.

Political parties must engender their manifestos and constitution to include quota systems for women, as well introducing gender-sensitive laws and policies that promote women's welfare. Parliament can enact laws that will entrench gender equality in political participation. They can also come up with laws that will compel political parties to introduce TSMs.

6.3 Mobilisation power of CSOs

The ZNWL's list of achievements shows the mobilising powers of WROs. The Zambian organisation has mobilised more than 1,000 women since its establishment, who have vied for leadership positions at various levels of decision-making processes – some with success. The ZNWL has also helped build the capacities of more than 1,500 women already in leadership, women aspiring candidates and women in political parties in various areas, and has successfully lobbied political parties and government to appoint women in key leadership and decision-making positions. Zambia now has a female vice president and most of the country's political parties have appointed women to key leadership positions. The ZNWL is continuing to work with key community leaders – such as traditional leaders and church leaders – with influence in supporting women's participation in leadership at all levels.

In Tanzania, meanwhile, during the 2014 constitution review process, several CSOs were active collecting citizens' views and creating public awareness, as well as monitoring what was happening in the process.

6.4 Support to women candidates

CSOs in Africa have been at the forefront of providing support for female candidates in elections, including through building the capacity of women aspirants, sensitising communities on the importance of inclusive political representation and lobbying governments and political parties to promote greater participation of women in politics and elections. The ZNWL exemplifies the type of support offered by CSOs to women candidates:

Box 6.1   The Zambia National Women's Lobby

'The ZNWL offers support to women leaders, aspiring candidates and women in political parties in various areas. We lobby political parties and Government to give full support to women and nominate them to key leadership and decision-making positions. We sensitise communities on the importance of women's full participation in governance, decision-making processes and leadership. We advocate for domestication of international instruments that promote women's participation – SADC/AU protocols. We also lobby political parties to adopt women and introduce legislated quota systems to guide appointments. We protested against political parties requesting huge sums of money as part of the party nomination process.'

Beauty Katebe, Board Chairperson, Zambia National Women's Lobby Group

CSOs in Cameroon, like More Women in Politics, play a crucial role in supporting women's participation in the electoral process. In 2016, the organisation signed an agreement with the Cameroon government to empower hundreds of youth and women in elections participation. This process involved building capacity to reinforce leadership and civic education.

Indeed, many women in politics in Commonwealth Africa come from civil society roots and acknowledge the important role that WROs have played in shaping their careers. This is illustrated by the examples that follow from Tanzania and Uganda:

Box 6.2 Link between women in politics and CSOs

'I can trace my political ambition from 1991 to 2000, when I actively engaged myself in human rights advocacy, specifically on the rights of women, people with disabilities and people living with HIV/AIDS in Tanzania and Eastern Africa.

Having worked with these communities and having experienced their challenges first-hand, I knew the trends were not as positive as they were being reported at the time.

I felt there was need for me to be the voice of these people since I had an in-depth understanding of the real situation on the field, which, coupled with facts and figures, were [in] stark contrast to what officials had been reporting. Then came a golden opportunity that provided me with a springboard to join politics: that was in 1998/99, when the parliament of Tanzania passed a law that required 30 per cent women's participation in legislatures.

As an activist, my major interest was to empower marginalised groups to be able to identify their own needs and take advantage of opportunities available to them in improving their lives.

Civil society institutions like the Tanzania Association for Non-Governmental Organisations and the Association of NGOs in Zanzibar, in collaboration with other international and national entities, have tirelessly contributed to the provision of various training and support mechanisms that seek to build morale and also empower women with skills on election procedures and campaign techniques.'

H.E. Samia Suluhu Hassan, Vice-President, United Republic of Tanzania

'Admittedly, civil society in Uganda has been very supportive of women's political participation. It is on record that before I joined parliament, I was the founder the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), and was a key player in fighting for women's rights in Uganda. We as parliamentarians have also benefited immensely from the partnership and training from CSOs in areas of gender-responsive budgeting and human rights, among others. There are 45 NGOs that are focused on women's rights in Uganda. They do not work in isolation, but in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development.

There are several umbrellas that house civil society organisations, like the Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), which comprises 16 women's organisations and nine activists. UWONET was created in 1993 after the East African Women's Conference in Kampala. This organisation was formed to represent a united voice of women, as well as to create a platform where women would collectively put forward issues of their political and economic life and other kinds of discrimination in various spheres of society.'

Rebecca Kadaga, first woman speaker, Uganda

6.5 Capacity-building for newly elected leaders

The need for capacity-building for women in politics is even greater following their election. There is need for ongoing support and a dynamic day-to-day relationship between WROs and women politicians. This is reflected in the example from Zambia:

Box 6.3 Building the capacity of newly elected female leaders in Zambia

'Most women that won the 2016 elections, especially at local government level, have requested for urgent capacity-building because they are entering politics for the first time, have never held any leadership positions before and most of them are young, below the age of 35. This was discovered during the ZNWL's recent local government conference, where it was established that about 90 per cent of the women that won local government elections [were] first-time politicians. The ZNWL is of the view that the newly elected women leaders should be trained in the following areas: local government systems and mechanisms; gender and gender mainstreaming; transparency, accountability and good governance; effective service delivery in the ward; understanding democracy and community participation; and decision-making skills, bargaining power and networking skills, advocacy, problem-solving skills and building alliances. These are some of the topics suggested by the newly elected women councillors themselves.

The other emerging challenge is the abrupt end of the political career of women that could not qualify to participate in the elections as candidates due to lack of qualifications. Most of these are highly experienced women, who still have the potential to be active in politics. Some of them have said they will upgrade their qualifications, so that they can participate in future elections. Others have given up. There is need to mobilise these women to continue being active in politics and mentor the young ones.

There is also need to promote cross-party collaboration among women from different political parties to counter the violence and hatred that escalated during the 2016 elections.'

Beauty Katebe, Board Chairperson, Zambia National Women's Lobby Group

6.6 Election watchdogs

CSOs often serve as gender and election watchdogs. In Uganda, CSOs launched the Citizens Election Observers Network – Uganda (CEON-U) to monitor the 2016 general elections. This was a collaborative effort of 15 CSOs, working together with the Uganda Electoral Commission and supported by international organisations such as the National Democratic Institute, the EU and USAID. Some of CEON-U's mandates included voter registration, voter education, media monitoring, women's participation and gender, participation of persons with disabilities, security and defending human rights (Democratic Governance Facility 2015).

The West Africa Civil Society Institute has provided women with training workshops to learn requisite skills to observe and report on presidential elections in Sierra Leone and Ghana. Sierra Leone (2012) and Nigeria (2015) CSOs have also set up Women's Situation Rooms (WSRs) to promote gender equality and peaceful and non-violent campaigning, especially condemning GBV.

NGOs in Ghana, meanwhile, played a visible role in demanding gender accountability in Ghana's 2016 elections through to the post-election period:

Case study 6.1 NGOs demand gender accountability in Ghana

The 2016 Ghana elections were both successful and peaceful, and part of this is attributed to the contributions of the country's vibrant civil society. Successive governments in Ghana have supported civil society over the years and protected their right of expression.

The Strengthening Transparency, Accountability and Responsiveness (STAR-Ghana) programme, funded by UK Aid (DFID), the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) and the EU, supported the 2016 electoral process. STAR-Ghana's mandate as described in its website is 'to develop a vibrant, well-informed and assertive civil society able to contribute to transformational national development and inclusive access to high-quality, accountable public services for all Ghanaian citizens'.

The programme provided financial support to civil society organisations, such as the Ghana Federation for the Disabled, to enable marginalised groups to participate in the electoral process. It also provided support to allow partnerships between civil society and electoral management bodies, in a bid to foster collaboration between the two, and further engaged the media on their role in the electoral process and supported presidential and parliamentary debates. Finally, the programme provided domestic and national oversight during the elections.

Other international organisations, like UN Development Programme and UN Women, also played a key role in supporting the political process. Part of this role included promoting peaceful dialogue in constituencies, promoting the participation of youth and women as both voters and candidates, strengthening transparency and information-sharing, and promoting dialogue and facilitating the role of women as leaders of peace initiatives during the election period through the Women's Situation Room.

This fully hands-on engagement of CSOs and other non-state actors in the electoral process, as well as their cordial relationships founded on neutrality and professionalism, can be emulated in other African countries. A favourable environment provided by government is crucial for such a space to exist.

CSOs in Ghana carried demands for accountability on to the post-election period, with a scrutiny of the cabinet. WILDAF-Ghana called on the government to honour its promise to appoint 30 per cent of women in public offices, as indicated in its 2016 manifesto, and in Article 35 Section 6(b) of the Constitution of Ghana.

According to members of the group, the list of nine women out of 36 ministerial appointees presented by the president to parliament did not reflect the 30 per cent promised in the 2016 manifesto.

Likewise, the Federation of International Women Lawyers (FIDA-Ghana) issued a statement condemning growing verbal attacks on women in public office which, it noted, was discriminatory, reprehensible and contrary to the spirit and letter of the constitution (*Daily Graphic* 2016).

6.7 Media monitoring

Media Monitoring Africa and Gender Links have conducted gender and media monitoring of several South African and Southern African elections (see Chapter 8). Gender Links has devised a holistic approach to gender and elections capacity-building and monitoring, which includes:

- capacity-building for women aspirants and candidates on campaigning and using the media (mainstream, new media and traditional media);

- gender and elections training for the mainstream media;

- gender and elections monitoring training for civil society;

- gender and elections media monitoring for media students; and

- conducting comprehensive gender audits of elections (see checklist in Annex A) that draw on all the above components.

6.8 Budget monitoring

Lack of citizen engagement in Tanzanian budget-making prompted the CSO Policy Forum to initiate a Budget Working Group. Among the activities of this group is to summarise national annual budgets in a way that is accessible and understandable to most citizens (Kwayu and Lipovsek 2010–2015).
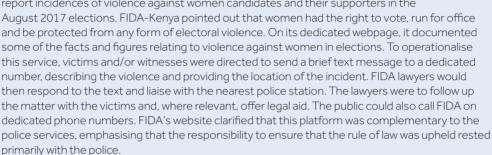
In Rwanda, CSOs are relatively active in the electoral and governance process and this has been a growing area. For example, the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) – in collaboration with One UN Rwanda – organised a two-day training designed for 19 CSOs, which has recently been awarded grants totalling US$620,000. The grants were given by RGB and One UN under a joint programme on Strengthening CSOs for Responsive and Accountable Governance in Rwanda (International Centre for Not-For-Profit Law 2017). The EU also works closely with Rwandan civil society on issues such as democracy and governance, gender, electoral processes and the promotion of human rights (EU, no date).

6.9 Monitoring gender violence during elections and promoting peace

Another important role played by CSOs is monitoring GBV during elections, as illustrated in the case study that follows from the August 2017 elections in Kenya. Similarly, CSOs have played an active role in peace-building, including quelling post-election violence. In Sierra Leone, women are involved in political peace-building initiatives at both the local and regional levels. For

> ### Case study 6.2 Women lawyers in Kenya blow the whistle on GBV during elections
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> Kenya's Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA-Kenya) launched a toll-free SMS hotline for victims, called *Sema Usikike* ('Speak and Be Heard'), to make it easier to report incidences of violence against women candidates and their supporters in the August 2017 elections. FIDA-Kenya pointed out that women had the right to vote, run for office and be protected from any form of electoral violence. On its dedicated webpage, it documented some of the facts and figures relating to violence against women in elections. To operationalise this service, victims and/or witnesses were directed to send a brief text message to a dedicated number, describing the violence and providing the location of the incident. FIDA lawyers would then respond to the text and liaise with the nearest police station. The lawyers were to follow up the matter with the victims and, where relevant, offer legal aid. The public could also call FIDA on dedicated phone numbers. FIDA's website clarified that this platform was complementary to the police services, emphasising that the responsibility to ensure that the rule of law was upheld rested primarily with the police.
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> *Federation of Women Lawyers (2017)*

example, the Campaign for Good Governance in Sierra Leone has advocated for women's involvement at all levels of peace building (Ekiyor 2008).

6.10 Checklist

- ✓ Are women's rights organisations among the civil society stakeholders consulted in the electoral process?
- ✓ Do civil society organisations (CSOs) promote gender-inclusive elections?
- ✓ Do CSOs support capacity-building of women candidates, regardless of political affiliation?
- ✓ Do CSOs support the gender mainstreaming efforts of EMBs?
- ✓ Do CSOs form part of election monitoring processes?
- ✓ Do CSOs conduct a specific gender audit of the elections?

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