

Chapter 9

Conclusions and Recommendations

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Key points



- There are at least 16 international, African and subregional commitments on gender equality in decision-making.
- Commonwealth Africa has recorded the greatest increase in levels of women's representation in parliament compared to other Commonwealth regions: from 19.0 per cent in 2004 to 26.6 per cent in 2016, a variance of 7.6 per cent. Commonwealth African countries could build on these gains, exchange best practices and become global leaders in achieving gender parity in politics.
- Research indicates that Africans want more, albeit better-quality, democracy. In this context, elections will continue to be the primary mode of attaining elected office. They must be conducted in an inclusive manner that allows women to compete on an equal footing with men.
- Legislators are in a powerful position with regard to enacting key electoral and legislative measures that can enhance or hinder women's political participation. They are critical in ensuring that national, regional, Commonwealth and international gender commitments are translated into implementable and enforceable legislation.
- Election management bodies demonstrate their own commitment to gender equality when they mainstream gender within their institutions. They must also mainstream gender throughout the electoral cycle.
- Commonwealth election observer mission reports recognise the role of political parties as key agents for political recruitment.
- Political parties should have clear guidelines on how they seek to achieve gender inclusiveness. This will require a review of party constitutions and processes, and re-alignment of women's leagues so that they can play more constructive roles within the parties.
- CSOs and women's organisations have been critical in promoting women's political participation through advocacy, training of women candidates and aspirants, monitoring the media to ensure gender sensitivity in reporting, and throwing light on violence against women in elections (VAWE), among others. They can play a critical role in delivering quality training that helps produce quality, impactful women political leaders.
- The media must ensure gender-responsive reporting, where issues are reported through the lenses of both women and men. Social media presents a powerful tool for promoting women in politics. Yet it can introduce another platform for VAWE. Media training for women candidates should include content on how to interact with both the positive and the negative elements of social media.
- Election observation teams must be gender-balanced. They can contribute to gender-inclusive elections by highlighting and promoting best practice in their reports and related advocacy. The gender aspects of the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation* and its accompanying *Code of Conduct* could be strengthened.

9.1 Requisite policy actions for key stakeholders

The recommendations to inform requisite policy actions are derived from a synthesis of the observer mission reports and the general trajectories available in the various analyses of gender and political development in Commonwealth Africa. The recommendations are made under five main actors: EMBs, the legislature, political parties, CSO actors and regional and international bodies.

1. ELECTION MANAGEMENT BODIES

- **Gender mainstreaming in policy structures and programmes**

The well-known fact that men dominate the political stage and set the rules of the game implies that EMBs have a role to play in ‘levelling the playing field’. The policy should specifically guide their demand side – what EMBs demand from key actors, especially political parties and the media – as well as their supply side – in terms of civic education, in content and messaging to achieve a paradigm shift.

- **Develop guidelines for political parties that require them to field a specified minimum of women candidates, where the legal framework enables this**

EMBs should develop and publicise clear guidelines for political parties that especially require established minimums of women candidates, where the legal framework enables this. EMBs should be empowered to reserve the right to have sanctions for non-compliance, including but not limited to threats to deregister political parties. In the same vein, EMBs should develop gender-responsive codes of conduct, which all parties should sign up to as part of the pre-election period activities.

- **Keep gender-disaggregated data on key aspects of the electoral process**

EMBs should develop and regularly update elaborate gender-disaggregated databases that include information on key parameters over the years. For example, data on the proportion of women as candidates at all levels, as voters, as election managers and as political party activists, including agents. This data will help in tracking progress and highlighting areas for action and innovation. The UN’s guide on gender-inclusive elections identifies the key role EMBs can play in this issue in terms of collecting and managing data on aspects such as voter registration, candidate registration, voter turnout and staffing (UNDP and UN Women 2015). Disaggregating such data will help improve the responsiveness of the EMBs by identifying key areas of entry.

- **Create a favourable condition for campaigns**

The campaign, as the central part of the electoral period, should be continuously monitored and documented to create favourable conditions for women candidates and voters. In particular, concrete strategies should be devised to address (prevent) electoral violence and monetisation of elections. Monetisation makes the campaign unnecessarily costly and often dissuades women from active participation, due to their limited economic muscle.

2. THE LEGISLATURE

- **Enact and amend the electoral laws**

It is clear that legal frameworks have been instrumental in propelling women into leadership positions. The PR systems have proved effective in embedding notions of inclusiveness, without putting the burden on the individual woman. PR systems have broad dividends for the political system, as they have high potential to cater for diversity and minimise conflict. This is partly the reason why some countries emerging out of conflict (e.g. Rwanda and South Africa) have adopted PR as the suitable electoral system. As a long-term strategy, national legislatures should aim at reforming the electoral laws towards PR systems.

- **Ensure basic compliance with international norms and national constitutions**

Commonwealth African countries are at different levels in terms of compliance with international norms and national constitutions. Swaziland, for instance, is noted as one case of limited compliance with the constitution, the SADC protocol of gender and development and the AU protocol of women's rights, as well as the Commonwealth Charter.

- **Regularly review, update and refine provisions on women's representation**

As the context changes, there is a need to regularly review and therefore refine provisions on women's representation so as to achieve the best possible outcomes. In countries outside of the SADC region where gender parity (50:50) has not been articulated as a principle, this should be given priority. The laws should empower EMBs to demand accountability on key parameters, including women's representation as candidates and party leaders. The laws should also ensure adequate independence of EMBs and require gender parity in the composition of key election management personnel.

3. POLITICAL PARTIES

- **Design clear gender policies**

Political parties should have clear guidelines on how they seek to achieve gender inclusiveness. This will help in tracking progress and documenting compliance with international and national norms. This will require a review of party constitutions and re-alignment of women's leagues, so that they can play more active roles to enhance women's engagement within the parties – beyond 'dancing' for party leaders.

- **Change the political culture and field women as candidates and in winnable positions**

Observer mission reports across Commonwealth Africa rightly recognise the role of political parties as key agents for political recruitment. Hence political parties need to field women candidates across the board – at the presidential, legislature and local government levels. Incentives for political parties to comply will come from the laws that require them to nominate and field women candidates. Often, structures of power tend to be amenable to inclusion and change if a '*business case*' is well articulated. In other words, the losses to the political party if and when they do not field women candidates should be well articulated.

4. CSO ACTORS

- **Invest in building a business case for political parties to include women as candidates**

Evidence has shown that political parties seek to maximise electoral fortunes. CSO actors should therefore invest in building a business case to demonstrate the losses parties incur by being male-dominated and gender-blind. A business case depends on the context of each country, but on the whole the success of such engagement depends on the ability of the women to become indispensable in the political system. This takes enormous and strategic social mobilisation within civic associations as well as political parties. Strategic selling of the gender agenda is key.

- **Design an advocacy strategy that is consistently monitored over time**

CSO advocacy tends to be episodic, partly influenced by resources. There is a need to identify cost-effective means of tracking and keeping that advocacy publicly alive and enduring.

- **Invest in knowledge-building**
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 continuous and cumulative basis.
- **Design support mechanisms for women and invest in quality**
One of the factors identified as a key barrier is what has been termed as ‘women lacking confidence’. Lack of confidence is only a by-product of the social system that diminishes women’s ambition for political leadership. Part of the civic mobilisation around this question would be to design support, especially for young women and especially focusing on producing quality.

5. REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL BODIES

- **Increase and refine parameters for observation on women’s participation in elections**
As part of the international observation function, teams should be gender-balanced. More importantly, the parameters from observation should be expanded and deepened beyond the general level to bring out the key issues that can be monitored over time. Also, women and youth as categories should be separated within the observation framework, as the two are different in terms of the sources of marginalisation.
- **Support partnerships to amplify the voice on gender-inclusive elections**
Regional and international bodies can enhance leverage on the issue of gender-inclusive elections through strengthening strategic partnerships. This will also have the effect of amplifying the voice on the topic accordingly. This support could be in terms of documentation, maintenance of tracking systems and/or strategic dissemination.

9.2 Conclusion

The question of gender-inclusive elections brings to the fore the structural imbalances in the political system. There is growing recognition that structural imbalances require continuous, enduring and long-term perspectives. Women’s participation as voters, candidates and election managers needs to be tracked using gender-disaggregated data to continuously proceed to inform strategic actions.

Table 9.1 Action matrix: Policy actions to achieve meaningful participation of women in elections

#	Key actors	Strategic actions	Specific interventions	Targets	Timeframe
1.	Electoral management bodies (EMBs)	Design a gender strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct wide consultations with key stakeholders in electoral processes to map out the status of women's participation in elections as managers, voters and candidates. Identify strategic actions for engendering EMBs. Train and build the capacities of election managers on approaches to integrate gender into electoral processes. 	National strategy for gender-inclusive elections	One year
		Establish a civic education commission to ensure sustainable civic engagement beyond election season	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design a gender-aware civic education programme and sensitise the public on rationale for women-specific political representation. Carry out regular civic education to raise women's awareness and ambition to engage in electoral processes and political leadership. Promote women's rights as citizens, voters and candidates. Women need to know that their participation in political leadership is by right rather than a privilege. Partner with civil society organisations to develop gender-sensitive campaign materials. Integrate civic and rights education programmes into the education system. 		
		Develop a mechanism for monitoring political party responsiveness to gender equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Track political party activities with regard to promoting gender equity (in manifestos, party leadership, sponsoring women candidates for political leadership). Enforce the regulations pertaining to the involvement of women in electoral processes (provide specific quotas for women's participation as electoral managers and candidates). Indicate the inclusion of gender as one of the key requirements for political party registration and qualification to participate in elections. Develop a gender-sensitive binding code of conduct governing legally recognised political parties, government and other political actors prior to, during and after elections on the involvement of women in electoral processes. The electoral codes of conduct should commit political parties to involve women as actors at all levels of leadership. De-register political parties that do not commit to implement gender-equity provisions on women's participation in electoral processes. 		

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Table 9.1 Action matrix: Policy actions to achieve meaningful participation of women in elections (Continued)

#	Key actors	Strategic actions	Specific interventions	Targets	Timeframe
2.	Political parties	Integrate gender into political party rules, structures and practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align political party laws to national laws (the constitution) and to regional and international laws, and protocols that state parties have assented to, pertaining to women's political participation. Develop gender policies. Review and incorporate gender-aware provisions into party constitutions (e.g. by ensuring specific quotas for women in party leadership, approval of female candidates as official political flag bearers in national elections etc.). Develop and operationalise women's leagues as recruiting avenues for political leadership. 		
		Mobilise resources for gender-responsive electoral processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify, mentor and support women to move into political leadership, e.g. through financing radio programmes, posters and mobilisation for their campaigns. 		
3.	Parliament	Reform electoral laws to ensure independence of EMBs and gender inclusiveness (enact and amend laws)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where possible, reform the electoral system towards PR. Provide for gender parity (50:50) political representation in national constitutions. Enact a law that requires the appointing authority to ensure equal representation of men and women on EMBs. 		
		Provide conceptual clarity on the labelling, mandate and modalities for electing women to the affirmative action seats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly review and update provisions on women-specific political representation to ensure that there is no perpetuation of inequality based on sex. 		

(Continued)

Table 9.1 Action matrix: Policy actions to achieve meaningful participation of women in elections (Continued)

#	Key actors	Strategic actions	Specific interventions	Targets	Timeframe
4.	CSO actors, including academia	Strategic selling of the gender agenda in electoral processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with EMBs to promote gender-aware civic education (e.g. by developing gender-sensitive campaign messages). Conduct regular studies to produce concrete evidence on the performance of EMBs and political parties. Identify key training areas for female candidates. Hold EMBs and political parties accountable on the implementation of their gender strategy. Collectively structure, implement and monitor a common women's agenda for gender-inclusive elections. Identify and support women to stand for political positions and invest in quality. 		
5.	Regional/ international bodies	Develop gender-responsive strategic partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and strengthen visible strategic partnerships for gender-inclusive electoral processes. Create mechanisms for state parties to regularly report on progress registered on women's participation in elections as voters and contestants. 		
		Create an information management system to track progress registered and constraints encountered by women in electoral processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote periodic research on the progress made by women. Support tracking systems, especially for women in local government and as candidates. Document prospects for increasing women's engagement in electoral processes. Compile national and international reports indicating progress on women's participation in electoral processes (in voter registers as voters, candidates and election officials, along with any other gender-sensitive trends in elections). Profile cases of women who have made it in political leadership at the regional and international levels. 		
		Constitute gender-sensitive electoral observer missions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure gender parity in the composition of electoral observer missions. Election observer missions should expand the measures of reporting on women beyond the general level. 		

In terms of women's representation in elective public structures, quotas as a first-track method have enabled progress in numbers that may not have been achieved at the same pace were it not for those special measures. Progress has been registered. However, gender parity, a critical component of human rights and human development, according to the Commonwealth Charter, is far from being a reality – and this calls for continuous innovation.

All stakeholders discussed in this handbook have a critical role to play in contributing to gender-inclusive elections as one way of ensuring women ascend to elected office. Yet 'charity begins at home': two key actors in particular, EMBs and political parties, are challenged to ensure that, within their own institutions, they are promoting gender equality.

Ultimately, women must offer themselves for public office and actively engage in party politics. The more women participate, the more they help create the world of the possible and move from the exception to the norm, to the legitimate. Efforts must be galvanised to increase the pool of women who are able to stand – especially from the young generation. This brings in the role of legislatures in terms of creating the requisite legal framework, which removes the remaining barriers to women's political participation and creates opportunities that give women a 'foot in the door'.

Once women have been elected, they must deliver, to give confidence to the electorate that women's political participation goes beyond numbers. Civil society and non-state actors have a role to play here, in supporting women with quality and sustained training. Through gender-responsive reporting, the media can showcase success stories of both genders, and contribute to positive narratives on leadership in Africa that deliver, irrespective of gender.

Examples of good practice pertaining to how these stakeholders contribute to gender-inclusive elections abound in Africa. Through experience-sharing, Commonwealth Africa can become global champions in achieving gender parity in politics, taking Rwanda's lead.

References

UNDP and UN Women (2015), *Inclusive Electoral Process: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation*, UN Women and UNDP, available at: http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/gender_equality_electoral-eng.pdf (accessed January 2018).