



IN BRIEF



WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

EAST AND SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION

What's the Issue?

Women's equal political participation and representation is the key to the promotion of gender equality, democracy and is key to the achievement of a sustainable future. Women's participation in politics leads to more inclusive decision making, diversifies the voices that are heard, and ensures different solutions are brought to policies that impact on everyone's lives. Advancing women's political participation is also crucial for delivering on the SDGs. That is why one of the Targets for Goal 5 is to "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life" (SDG Target 5.5).

UN Women's East and Southern Africa (ESARO) programming on Governance, Leadership and Political Participation is focused on providing technical support and capacity building to Member States, civil society and regional organizations, to enable women to fully and equally participate in decision-making and to ensure that women and girls benefit from gender-responsive laws, policies, budgets, services, and accountable institutions.

Regional Landscape

The Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) region has documented progress in women's election to national political institutions, but overall, across the region, women continue to be under-represented in public life and the decision-making institutions and processes that guide critical development planning and policy actions. Despite progress in improving women's political

representation in formal institutions of government and using temporary special measures (TSMs) such as gender quotas and affirmative action policies, in some countries, considerable challenges remain.

Across the region there is variation in women's representation in national parliaments. Five countries are among the 25 countries globally with the highest number of women in parliament and that have achieved gender balance (i.e., over 40% women's representation). These are Rwanda with 61.3% (which has the world's highest share of women in parliament), South Africa with 46.7%, Namibia with 44.2%, Mozambique with 42.4% and Ethiopia 41.5%. Ten countries in the region have between 30- and 39% women's representation, five between 20-29% and three countries with 7-11% women's representation, respectively, in parliament. Eleven countries in the region have a woman Speaker of Parliament.

Women's equal participation in local governments and decision-making processes is equally critical for creating gender sensitive policies and for promoting sustainable development. Even though women's representation at local government globally (34%) is higher than that of women in parliament (26.4%) women are still less well represented at this level of decision-making in the region. Of the countries with available data on local government, few are over the 40% threshold; in ESAR these are Namibia 45%, Rwanda 44%, South Africa 41% and Uganda 46%. Other countries above the 30% threshold are Kenya 34% and Lesotho 39%. The ESA regional average of

lected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local government (%) (SDG indicator 5.5.1b) is 38.9%.

Much of the progress in increasing the number of women in national parliaments and at the local level is due to the adoption and implementation of gender quotas, but more needs to be done to reach gender parity. Across the ESA region, nine countries have enacted either a constitutional or legislative quota for women at national level. For example, Lesotho, South Africa and Namibia introduced affirmative action measures in their legislative frameworks. In Namibia, the high representation of women in local governments is largely attributable to legislation requiring political parties to include at least 30% women on their party candidate lists.

Between 2020 and 2021 there were positive developments with regards to women in executive positions. In 6 countries in Africa women are holding the Heads of States and/or Government the region of which 3 are from ESA: Ethiopia (HOS), Tanzania (HOS), Uganda (HOG). As of 1 January 2021, of the 13 countries globally, that have 50%+ women ministers, only Rwanda made the list. Seventeen countries, globally, have 40%+ women ministers and only three countries from Africa - ESAR, specifically - fall within this bracket: South Africa, Mozambique and Ethiopia.

Challenges

Limited implementation of global, regional and national commitments to gender parity in decision-making positions, including in elective office. Statistics show greater compliance of TSMs at national level but less compliance at local level. Where legislative and policy commitments have been made at the national level, lacking or poor implementation mechanisms weaken accountability.

o Historical and structural unequal power relations, negative and patriarchal gender norms, stereotypes contribute limited women's participation in politics. Discriminatory laws, policies and practices or insufficient implementation of laws and policies that protect and promote women's rights also exacerbate the challenges and undermine trust in governance and public life.

o Violence against women in politics (VAWP) remains one of the major hindrances to women's engagement with the electoral process and taking on leadership roles.

o The institutions for decision-making and governance, such as election management bodies (EMBs) and political parties are male dominated, and women's access or participation is met by structural and ideological challenges.

o Women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and experiencing additional vulnerabilities due to, for example, their gender, disability, and age.

o Funding challenges negatively affect the advocacy efforts and available support for women's political rights even though women's organizations are pivotal in dismantling patriarchy by challenging discriminatory laws and structures and mobilizing women for collective action.

Our Solutions

UN Women's ESA Regional Office (ESARO) supports regional bodies, national governments and stakeholders to strengthen women's political participation and gender-responsive governance through innovative solutions and interventions across the region, including:

- Contributing to the creation of a conducive legal and policy framework for women's political participation.
- Supporting the alignment of national frameworks and policies to regional and global normative frameworks on gender equality and women's political participation.
- Partnering with regional bodies to hold Member States accountable for commitments made on women's political participation.
- Supporting regional economic commissions (RECs), UN Women country offices (COs) and their relevant stakeholders to monitor global and regional progress on women's political participation.
- Support to and collaboration with RECs to promote the implementation of gender responsive election observation guidelines and other strategies and the adherence to international and regional norms which promote gender responsive elections and equal participation in electoral processes.
- Providing technical and advisory services to regional bodies and other key governance and electoral stakeholders to develop policy frameworks that promote gender balance in the political sphere.
- Supporting capacity-building of regional civil society organizations (CSOs) and regional bodies on various thematic issues.
- Organizing regional and national training of trainers for women's political empowerment, supporting programme development and implementation and providing advisory services on advocacy campaigns and other initiatives.
- Conducting research initiatives.
- Contributing to or developing knowledge products, policy briefs on women's leadership and political participation.



How We Make a Difference: Step by Step

Recent UN Women successes from around the region include:

Zimbabwe: In preparation for the 2023 elections, UN Women in collaboration with the Zimbabwe Gender Commission is supporting the roll out of an initiative titled, “Women Rise in Politics,” to build the capacity of women to run for elections. The initiative includes mentorship of aspiring women political candidates to support them in understanding the process of running for office, provide them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competencies to effectively participate in political decision-making positions and, ultimately, increase representation and participation of women in politics in Zimbabwe.

Uganda: CO provided technical support to the Electoral Commission to develop a Gender strategy, informed by a comprehensive gender assessment. The assessment ascertained the extent to which the Commission mainstreamed gender equality into its policies, systems and practices, The focusing on the external environment within which the Commission executes its mandate, including the status of women’s participation in politics, and the relevant legal framework. It also reviewed the Commission’s internal systems and capacities, including senior management’s commitment to gender equality, its technical capacity, and human resource policies and practices. A wide range of gender and elections stakeholders were consulted. The Gender Strategy is now an institutional tool that the Election Commission utilizes to promote women’s participation in politics in efforts to increase women’s representation and to level the playing field.

Ethiopia: In 2021, UN Women launched an initiative under the theme, “Ensuring Gender Inclusive Electoral Process in Ethiopia’s 6th General Election”. In partnership with the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE), the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), and the Ethiopian Network of Women’s Association (NEWA), UN Women supported gender-inclusive electoral processes. Support to these institutions included advisory services and capacity-strengthening for key electoral stakeholders to ensure a gender-sensitive electoral process. UN Women launched its electoral support project with the support of UNDP in 2019 and by partnering with NEBE. The collaboration focused on empowering women political parties’ members, capacity-building for journalists, and assigning a gender focal point within the Election Board to undertake a gender assessment

of electoral normative frameworks and support gender mainstreaming in the election. UN Women’s collaboration with NEBE also includes supporting awareness platforms and knowledge generation on political parties’ gender responsiveness and violence against women in elections prevention.

Somalia: UN Women is supporting advocacy for the adoption and implementation of TSMs, specifically implementation of the 30% quota, as well as capacity-strengthening of men and women parliamentarians on legislative drafting and promotion of women’s participation. In preparation for the 11th Parliamentary elections in 2020-2021, UN Women and partner agencies held focused trainings for women political aspirants on transformative leadership and advocacy skills to prepare them as candidates and delegates in the elections. UN Women further supported a national coordination platform between civil society groups and the Somali Women Parliamentary Association to advance the promotion of women’s political rights.

Tanzania: Technical support was provided to women’s parliamentary caucuses and associations on awareness raising, constituency outreach and legislative initiatives focused on women’s rights, gender equality, constitutional review, gender-responsive budgeting, which led to private motions to strengthen gender-based violence laws and development of key institutional documents to support the functioning of parliament. The CO office support contributed to strengthen the capacity of members of parliament their effectively participate in the National Assembly and Zanzibar House of Assembly discussions and debates through legislative, budgetary and oversight functions to advance women’s rights and gender equality. Some of the key interventions/engagements with these institutions included supporting the development of a Gender Strategy and Action Plan for the national assembly and Zanzibar HoR, and now informing different processes within the two institutions. A Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming for the national assembly was also finalised in 2021. These documents were developed after a comprehensive gender audit and gender capacity assessment of the national assembly and house of representatives that was conducted with technical and financial support from UN Women.