



**WARNING BELLS
ARE RINGING:
GENDER IN THE 2017
LESOTHO LOCAL
GOVERNMENT
ELECTIONS**



Voters braced the chilly morning weather to vote at Malumeng Primary School, in Thabana-Morena constituency.

Credit: Lesotho Times

QUICK FACTS

- Lesotho is a Constitutional Monarchy with two spheres of governance - Central and Local.
- Local Government is established through Local Government Act (1997) and Local Government Elections Act (1998).
- The Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy provides policy direction and support for local authorities; Ministry is responsible for the administration of the Local Government Act.
- The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) is responsible for the administration of the Local Government Elections Act.
- Local government is made up of 76 local authorities.
- Traditional leadership in the form of Chiefs are also represented in Local Authorities.
- Lesotho held first Local Government elections in April 2005, second in October 2011 and third in September 2017.
- Women's representation in local government declined from 58% in 2005 to 49% in 2011 to 40% in 2017, despite adjustments made to the original unpopular quota for women in local government.
- Lesotho, which had exceeded and then come to close to achieving gender parity in local government, is now third in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) after Namibia and South Africa. A key focus now is how the lost ground will be recovered in the count-down to 2030.

SYNOPSIS

Once held up as the shining star of women's political representation at the local level, the proportion of women in local government in Lesotho has steadily declined from 58% in the first local elections in 2005, to 49% in 2011 to 40% in the September 2017 elections. This steady downward trend has taken place despite changes in the electoral laws to address concerns about the quota for women's political participation in the first local government elections in 2005. It dims the hope of Lesotho achieving 50/50 by 2030 in line with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Lesotho is now third (after Namibia and South Africa) in the SADC ranking of women's participation in local government.

BACKGROUND

Lesotho has only had three Local Government elections, and is still in the process of decentralising services from National level to Local level, with a lot of the administration still being done at the District level through the Office of the District Council Secretary (DCS). However, there is a Decentralisation Policy that was adopted by the Cabinet in 2014. Local government comprises:



- **Municipal Council:** This one (1) Local Authority is Maseru City, it is made up of an urbanised region with some rural surroundings.
- **Urban Councils:** The Urban Councils comprise of 11 urban areas with the exception of Maseru.



Manka community council Councillors.

Photo: Matela Sekila

- **Community Councils:** The 64 Community Councils are based in primarily village or rural communities.
- **District Councils:** The 10 District Councils are made up of representatives of the Community Councils but exclude individuals from Urban and Municipal authorities.

During the first local elections in 2005, the country adopted a system of reserving one third seats in a First Past the Post (FPTP) system for women, i.e. only women could contest these seats. In addition to the reserved seats, women won 28% of the openly contested seats, bringing the total to 58%. However, following a challenge in the High Court, Lesotho opted for the "Tanzania model" (later adopted also in Zimbabwe at the national level).

The system is mixed FPTP and then PR with closed party lists for the special seats reserved for women. In this mixed system, 30% of council seats are allocated for women only to parties in proportion to their percentage of the vote in the elections, i.e. on a Proportional Representation (PR) basis. In 2011, in addition to these PR seats women won 19% of the FPTP seats; a lower percentage than before, possibly because the first system had been so unpopular.

2017 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION OUTCOMES

The third local government elections scheduled for October 2016 took place in September 2017 due to Lesotho's 50th Independence Anniversary celebrations. In all, 1394 Councillors were elected in the September 2017 polls (FPTP seats, special PR seats for women and elected chiefs). Of these 555 were women: 40% of the total.

2017 Lesotho Local Government Election Results

POLITICAL PARTY	Total number of Councillors by sex and by %				FPTP Results for Men and Women Councillors				Women reserved seats	
	Women	Men	All Councillors	% of women	Women	Men	Total	% of Women	Women	% of Women
All Basotho Convention (ABC)	193	346	539	36%	80	346	426	19%	113	36%
Alliance of Democrats (AD)	47	47	94	50%	11	47	58	19%	36	11%
Basotho National Party (BNP)	24	19	43	56%	6	19	25	44%	18	6%
Democratic Congress (DC)	174	184	358	49%	74	184	258	29%	100	32%
Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD)	33	40	73	45%	8	40	48	17%	25	8%
Movement for Economic Change (MEC)	16	28	44	36%	1	28	29	3%	15	5%
Popular Front for Democracy (PFD)	11	10	20	50%	4	10	14	29%	7	2%
Other Parties	1	2	4	25%	1	2	3	33%	0	0
INDEPENDENTS	11	59	70	10%	11	59	70	16%	-	-
ELECTED CHIEFS	45	104	149	30%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	555	839	1394		196	735	931		314	
%	40%	60%	100%	40%	21%	79%	100%	21%	100%	100%

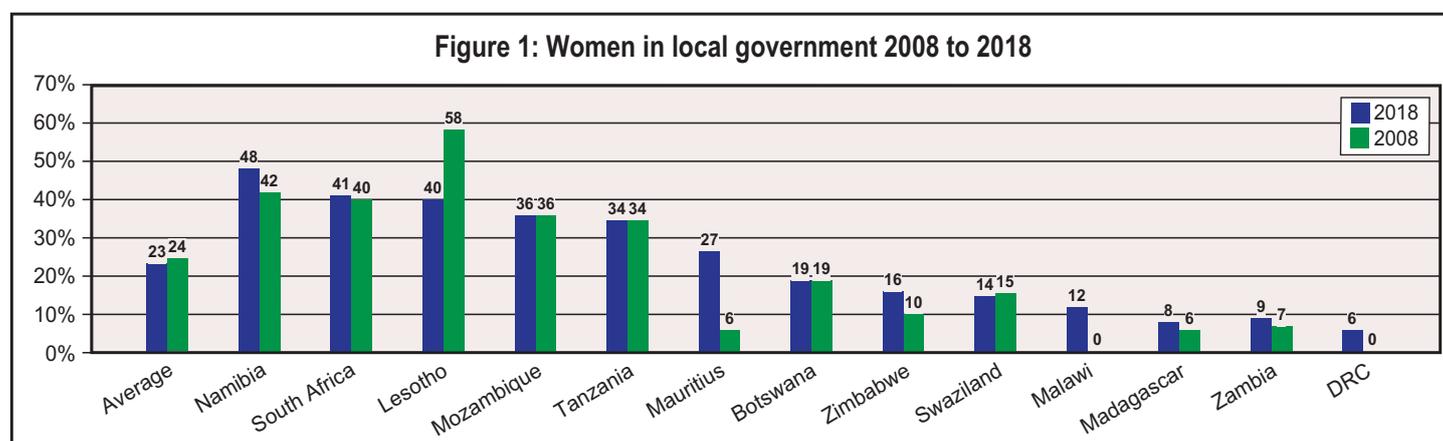
Table One shows that women won 196 out of the 931 FPTP seats, giving them 21% of these seats (slightly higher than the 19% in 2011). The 314 additional seats reserved for women on a PR basis is one third of the number of FPTP seats. Independent candidates and elected Chiefs have significantly less women representatives. Out of 70 Independent candidates, 59 were men and 11 were women. Chiefs are not elected by ordinary members of Lesotho society. They are nominated by their peers and voted for by fellow traditional leaders. Out of 149 elected Chief¹ candidates, 45 women nominated by their peers represented 3% of the total Councillors.

The PR seats reserved for women on a proportional basis boosted party performance considerably. The

party with the majority of seats in Parliament, the All Basotho Convention (ABC), attained 80 out of 931 FPTP seats, but got 193 seats through its PR quota. This boosted the party's proportion of women to 36%. The Democratic Congress (DC) had the second highest representation of women at 174: 74 came through the FPTP and 100 through the PR seats.

Women in the Alliance of Democrats (AD) obtained 11 FPTP seats and 36 PR seats, totalling 47 which is 50% of the 94 seats won by the Party. Women in the Basotho National Party (BNP) obtained six seats on the FPTP and 18 on PR bringing the total representation of women to 24 - 56% of the total seats for the party.

Lesotho in the regional context



¹ Chiefs are not elected by ordinary members of Lesotho society. They are nominated by their peers and voted for by fellow traditional leaders.

Figure 1 shows women's representation in local government in Southern Africa from 2008 to 2018, where comparative figures are available. Malawi held local elections for the first time in 2014. Salient facts include:

- The average representation of women in local government has declined from 24% to 23% over the ten years. This is largely due to the decline of the proportion of women in local government in Lesotho from 58% to 40% over this period.
- Key gains have been made in Mauritius (from 6% to 27%) as a result of the adoption of a gender neutral quota there; and Namibia (from 42% to 48%). Namibia currently leads the way with regard to women's representation in local government.
- Only five countries have exceeded 30% women in local government (Tanzania, Mozambique, Lesotho, South Africa and Namibia).
- Seven SADC countries (Botswana, Zimbabwe, ESwatini, Malawi, Madagascar, Zambia and DRC) have less than 20% women in local government. DRC (6%) has the lowest representation of women in local government.
- Four countries (Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Tanzania) have reached or are highly likely to reach or come close to the 50% target by 2020 especially if political parties adopt special measures for increasing women's representation and participation with their manifestos, effectively implement the policies and strengthen their existing voluntary and legislated/constitutional quotas. Lesotho's main challenge is to regain lost ground.

CONCLUSIONS

Lesotho's leadership role on gender and local government in the region is waning but not lost. Efforts of civil society organisations, the Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sport and Recreation (MGYSR), the Gender Technical Committee (GTC) amongst others are evidence of this.

Women outside political parties or within traditional leadership structures continue to be subjected to a political environment that is unkind towards women standing alone. This demonstrates that women not only require a quota system or reserved seats but also support within their political parties and/or other bodies that can provide them with the necessary support to stand for office.

While there is no perfect quota system reserved seats on a PR basis are better than reserved seats in a FPTP system in that the latter is more fair. Men are not excluded from contesting such elections. All parties get a share of the PR seats in proportion to their performance in the elections. What is worrying is that by now women candidates should be gaining confidence to contest the FPTP seats. The fact that this percentage of women is declining points to the fact that special measures must be accompanied by capacity building and gathering of evidence of the difference that women make to local government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Campaign for the removal of formal and informal barriers to women's political participation. There is a crucial need for change in perceptions and behavior towards women, more civic education about women and men's equal participation in politics and decision making in public service especially now, ahead of 2030.
2. Ensure the effective implementation of the PR and quota at Local Government by decentralising powers and giving Local Councils executive powers.
3. Work with political parties to adopt the PR system and include a 50% quota to ensure women's equal opportunities and representation in political leadership at local and national levels. There is a tendency for men to stand for the FPTP and then put women on the PR lists because of the legislated quota that exists. Political parties need to embed gender parity in all their policies and practices.
4. Lobby for a quota for the Chiefs that are elected to the council as more men are always elected. For example, in the 2017 Local Chieftaincy Councils, women constitute only 30%.
5. Lobby for electoral reform from the FPTP to the constitutional adoption of the PR system only. The PR system is more conducive for women's participation especially at local government.
6. Work with media houses to make sure the "every voice counts." The media must work to increase coverage of women and their various roles in order to change mind-sets and thus encourage more women to contest for political positions.

