



# Effective participation

# 7



Aminata Touré, Senegal, has served as Justice Minister, Prime Minister (for a year) and until recently headed the Economic, Social and Environmental council of Sénégal.

*Credit: Abdou Cissé, Le Quotidien*

## KEY POINTS

- Women are least represented at the executive leadership level as President, Vice President, Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister. In 54 African countries, only nine of these posts (8%) are held by women.
- Only 21% of African Parliament speakers are women, with variations between 35% in Southern Africa to zero in North Africa and the Horn.
- Women are still under-represented in cabinets across Africa, with only 22% of these positions occupied by women.
- In cabinet, women dominate in the social portfolios (including women's and youth affairs, health, education and culture). In a sample of 12 cabinets across the country, women comprised 34% of the ministers in these posts.
- On the other hand, women represented just 14% of the ministers in the justice and security portfolios (including defense, safety and security, foreign affairs).
- More research is required into the qualitative difference that women make. Qualitative evidence suggests that where women are represented in sufficient numbers and are able to participate effectively, they bring different agendas, priorities and results to decision-making.

Women serve as Heads of State or Government in only 21 countries in the world. 119 countries have never had a woman leader.<sup>1</sup> At the current rate, parity in the highest decision-making positions will not be reached for another 130 years. Only 21% of government ministers are women, and only 14 countries have achieved 50% or more women in cabinets. With an annual increase of less than one percentage point per annum, gender parity in ministerial positions will not be achieved before 2077.<sup>2</sup>

In its 2003 study on women in decision-making in Southern Africa, Gender Links (GL) noted that:

The recent discourse on good governance has highlighted the fact that democracy is not just about elections. It is about all interest groups being represented so that they can actively participate in decisions that affect their lives. Such participation makes governance more responsive to the needs and concerns of all sectors of society. When governance is more responsive, it is more likely to be more transparent and more accountable. This explains why women's

equal participation in political decision-making is not just a matter of being “politically correct” but is a vital component of good governance.<sup>3</sup>

Future Barometers need to devise more probing indicators for measuring the difference that women make. This chapter focuses on the proxy indicators agreed in the inaugural WPP Barometer for measuring effective participation. These include where women are located in decision-making structures in Africa, from executive leadership to municipal mayors. The chapter provides examples of what women in these positions are doing to advance gender equality. It illustrates how things are changing, albeit slowly, with more women coming into decision-making positions as Presidents and Vice-Presidents, Ministers, Speakers and Mayors.

The chapter shows that there is far more to women's participation in decision-making than their mere presence. While there is much focus now on achieving gender parity by 2030, it is not too soon to start asking the “beyond numbers” questions introduced in this chapter.

## Executive leadership

The highest level a politician can aspire to is the Head of State, as President or Prime Minister. Women are least likely to hold executive positions in government. Of the 113 top executive positions (President, Vice President, Prime Minister, and Deputy Prime Minister) in 54 African countries, only nine are held by women.<sup>4</sup> Generally, this is an elected position, and it requires a high degree of backing from ones' party. Women are slowly reaching for the top and taking on the race for the presidency. But there is a long way to go.

There are a growing number of women presidential running mates and therefore vice presidential candidates. This trend is not limited to the larger parties and smaller parties. Countries whose electoral laws provide for a running mate for the presidency may have a higher chance of bringing women closer to the top. In the long run, this incremental presence will provide the opportunity for women to demonstrate their ability to govern. Although institutionalised deputyship for women is not a desirable phenomenon, more women running at this level can help to normalise their presence at the top.

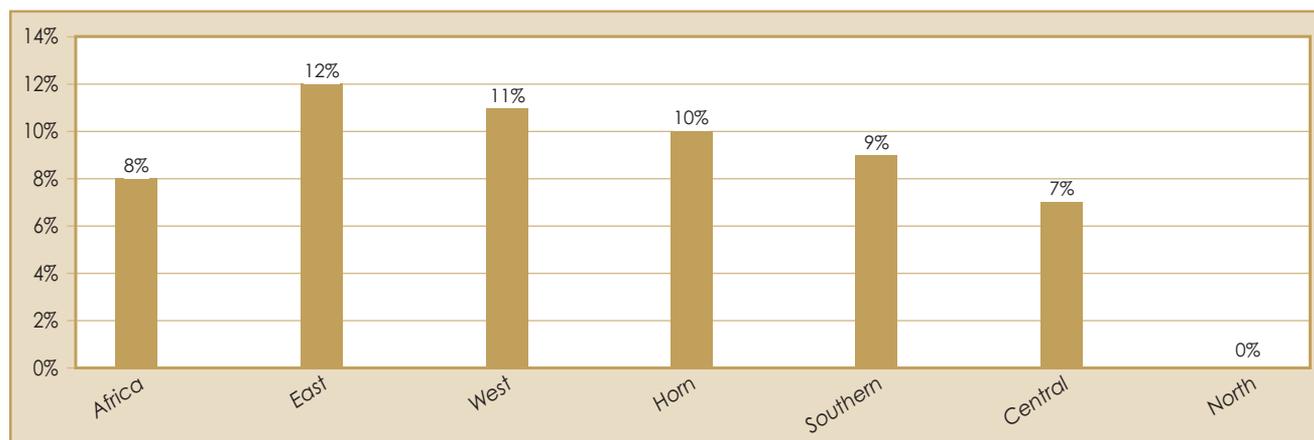
<sup>1</sup> UN Women, Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation <[https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#\\_edn3](https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#_edn3)> accessed 13 March 2021

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Lowe Morna, C., Ringing up the Changes (Gender Links, 2004) pp.249

<sup>4</sup> See Annex 16

Figure 7.1: Women in top executive positions in Africa by region



Source: Compiled by GL with information from government websites see Annex 16.

Figure 7.1 shows that women hold just eight per cent of top executive positions (President, Vice-President, Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister). The proportion ranges from 12% in East Africa to zero in North Africa.

Table 7.1: Top women leaders in African governments

Country	Name	Position	Rank	Took office
Tanzania	Samia Hassan Suluhu	President	Highest elected post	19 March 2021
Ethiopia	Sahle-Work Zewde	President	Elected but largely ceremonial position	25 October 2018
Namibia	Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila	Prime Minister	Appointed by President	21 March 2015
Gabon	Rose Christiane Ossouka Raponda	Prime Minister	Nominated by President	16 July 2020
Zambia	Inonge Mutukwa Wina	Vice-President	2nd highest post - elected with President	26 January 2015
Liberia	Jewel Cianeh Taylor	Vice-President	2nd highest post - elected with President	22 January 2018
The Gambia	Isatou Touray	Vice-President	2nd highest post - appointed by President	15 March 2019
South Sudan	Rebecca Nyandeng De Mabior	Fourth Vice-President	Appointed by President	21 February 2020
Togo	Victoire Tomegah Dogbé	Prime Minister	Appointed by President	28 September 2020

Source: Compiled by Gender Links with information from government websites.

Table 7.1 shows that there are currently nine women in executive leadership positions. The highest ranking is President Samia Hassan Suluhu of Tanzania who took over following the death of President John Magufuli in March 2021. Sahle-Work Zewde is president of Ethiopia, but this is largely a ceremonial position. Three African countries (Namibia, Gabon and Togo) have women Prime Ministers; these are appointed by the Presidents in their countries. Four are in the Vice-

President position, which is the second-highest position in the executive. All these top women took office in the last six years and are the first women to hold these positions in their respective countries. Prior to 2015, seven women held the top position, including two Presidents and five interim or acting Presidents. This shows that change in this area is slow. There are a sprinkling of women in top posts. At current rates this is unlikely to change any time soon.



Photo: Mama Samia Suluhu  
Facebook page

**Samia Suluhu Hassan** made history by becoming the first female president of Tanzania on 19 March 2021 following the sudden death of President John Magufuli. According to the constitution she will now

serve out the rest of Magufuli's Presidential term until 2025.

A seasoned politician, she first ran for office in 2000, was elected as a special seat member to the Zanzibar House of Representatives and appointed a minister by then President Amani Karume. Since then she has served in various roles in cabinet until she was elected as former President Magufuli's running mate, becoming the first female vice-president of the country following the 2015 elections.

Since her appointment Suluhu has been profiled in most international media as “soft-spoken.” For many, Hassan is a figure of comfort and strength<sup>5</sup>, a humble negotiator who is willing to seek consensus and reconciliation.<sup>6</sup>

These skills will stand her in good stead as she takes over from a leader with centralised power who repressed opposition from political parties, media and civil society during his term.<sup>7</sup> Magufuli will likely be remembered for denying the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, declaring the country free of the virus following three days of prayer,<sup>8</sup> and rejected vaccine as dangerous, saying they could be white men's attempt to use Tanzanians as guinea pigs.<sup>9</sup>

How Hassan manages the COVID-19 pandemic will be one of her first tests as President of the country. Will she continue down the road of her predecessor and continue to deny the severity of the pandemic or will she put in place measures to fight the pandemic in line with WHO guidelines, including acquiring vaccines for all citizens?

Analysts are also raising questions about how she will deal with the state of repression that characterised her predecessors leadership. Will she maintain the status-quo or will she reinstitute principles of civic and political freedoms like un-banning political party gatherings, rescinding oppressive laws and putting a stop to forced disappearances and arbitrary police detention for expressing critical opinions about the government?

It is too early to tell what kind of leader she will be, but in her national address, she conveyed the need for unity. “This is the time to stand together and get connected. It's time to bury our differences, show love to one another, and look forward with confidence.”<sup>10</sup>

Asserting her status as one of the few African women in a top political position Suluhu Hassan said: “I know there are people who have doubt and ask, 'Can this woman be the President of the United Republic of Tanzania?' Well, I would like to tell them that the one standing here is the President. I repeat, the one standing here is the President of the United Republic of Tanzania who is biologically a woman.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/03/25/tanzanias-first-female-president-has-arrived-with-some-serious-red-flags/>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-03-26-samia-suluhu-hassan-will-new-tanzania-president-aim-to-fill-magufulis-big-shoes-or-walk-a-new-path-altogether/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.medicalbrief.co.za/archives/prayer-has-rid-the-country-of-covid-19-says-tanzanias-president/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/03/25/tanzanias-first-female-president-has-arrived-with-some-serious-red-flags/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/tanzania-first-woman-president-samia-suluhu-hassan/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/03/25/tanzanias-first-female-president-has-arrived-with-some-serious-red-flags/>



**Ethiopia** has both a President and Prime Minister. As a parliamentary republic, most administrative power is vested in the Prime Minister and his government. The President is primarily a figurehead executive, however, with reserve powers that may be exercised in certain exceptional circumstances without the approval of another branch of the government. The President is an elected position. Following the

resignation of incumbent Mulatu Teshome, Ethiopia held a snap presidential election in October 2018. Diplomat Sahle-Work Zewde was elected without contest to a six-year term, becoming the first female President and the first female head of state since the death of Empress Zauditu in 1930.<sup>12</sup> She is named as the 96th most powerful, and the highest-ranking African woman on Forbes business magazine's annual edition of the list of 100 Most Powerful Women.

## Central African Republic: Samba-Panza Chief of transitional government



Catherine Samba-Panza, former chief of the transition government and candidate for the December 2020 presidential and local elections, visiting women traders in the 7th ward of Bangui. Photo: Flora Sandrine Mbagna

Catherine Samba-Panza was elected interim President and Chief of the Central African Republic's (CAR) transitional government from January 2014 to March 2016. She was the first woman to be head of state in that country and the eighth woman to do so in Africa. She inherited a country devastated by the rebel army and intercommunity hate. Despite that, she managed to bring the transition to its completion by organising in 2015 and 2016 free, transparent and trustworthy elections, which brought back constitutional order in the country.

A non-partisan politician who served as Mayor of Bangui from 2013 - 2014, she was the only woman presidential candidate among 16 men

for the December 2020 elections. She stood as an independent candidate and received 0.9%, placing here 11th in the race. Her motto is parity between men and women, or at least the effective application of the 35% quota of in all decision making positions.

During her term Samba-Panza appointed many women to high positions in the public sector, government, and national institutions. At that time, women representation in government rose from 5% to 29%. At the end of her mandate as transition Chief, she participated in various national, regional and international meetings. She shared her experience as a woman leader, as a candidate and her experience in the peace talks and the prevention of conflicts. She is presently the President of the Pan-African Observatory of Women's Leadership and Vice-President of the Network of African Union Women for Mediation and the Prevention of Conflicts. She is a member of the world network of mediators.

Samba-Panza, a married mother of three, gives credit for her success to a supportive family. They understand her political ambitions and her commitment to promoting women.

*Case study written by Fridolin Ngoulou*

<sup>12</sup> Wikipedia, Ethiopian Presidential Elections < [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018\\_Ethiopian\\_presidential\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2018_Ethiopian_presidential_election) > Accessed 2 March 2021

One of the main reasons women do not occupy the highest executive positions is because they do not put themselves forward as candidates. Where they do, they are significantly outnumbered by men. This is, however, slowly changing, with strong women coming forward and showing other women what is possible.



In **Tanzania** women made a strong showing in the 2015 presidential elections. In the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party two women made it to the final three candidates for President. For the 2020 Presidential elections John Pombe Magufuli had a woman running mate, Samia Suluhu Hassan, who became the vice president. Out of the 15 presidential candidates, two, Cecilia Augustino Mwanga and Queen Cuthbert Sendiga, were women. They only won 0,10 and 0,05% of the vote, placing them 10th and 12th in the race, respectively. However this sets an important

precedent and may encourage other aspiring candidates to step forward.



There was just one young woman, among ten men, who stood as a Presidential candidate in **Uganda's** January 2021 elections. Nancy Kalembe said “Uganda needs a change of leadership after 34 years of President Yoweri Museveni. The country's healthcare, education, infrastructure, and jobs are sorely lacking.”<sup>13</sup> She launched her campaign in November 2020 running as an independent candidate, making her only the fourth woman to run for the highest office in the country. Her campaign focused on anti-poverty and anti-unemployment programmes, as well as health care and infrastructure. Financial problems plagued Kalembe's campaign, but she received 0.37% of the total vote, placing her 8th in the race.<sup>14</sup>

## Women Speakers/ Presidents of Parliament

The Speaker is the principal office bearer and acts as Representative and Spokesperson, and Chief Executive Officer for Parliament.

The Speaker has many responsibilities, which include constitutional, statutory, procedural and administrative powers and functions. They preside over sittings of the House and maintain the rules and order. During sittings the Speaker's official role is to moderate debate, make rulings on procedure and announce the results of votes. The Speaker decides who may speak and has the powers to discipline members who break the procedures of the Chamber or House.

The Speaker is required to provide political leadership to the House, act impartially and protect all parties' rights in Parliament. Speakers must ensure that all processes relating to



RAZANAMAHASOA Christine, President of the National Assembly Madagascar.  
Photo: Zotonantenaina RAZANADRATEFA

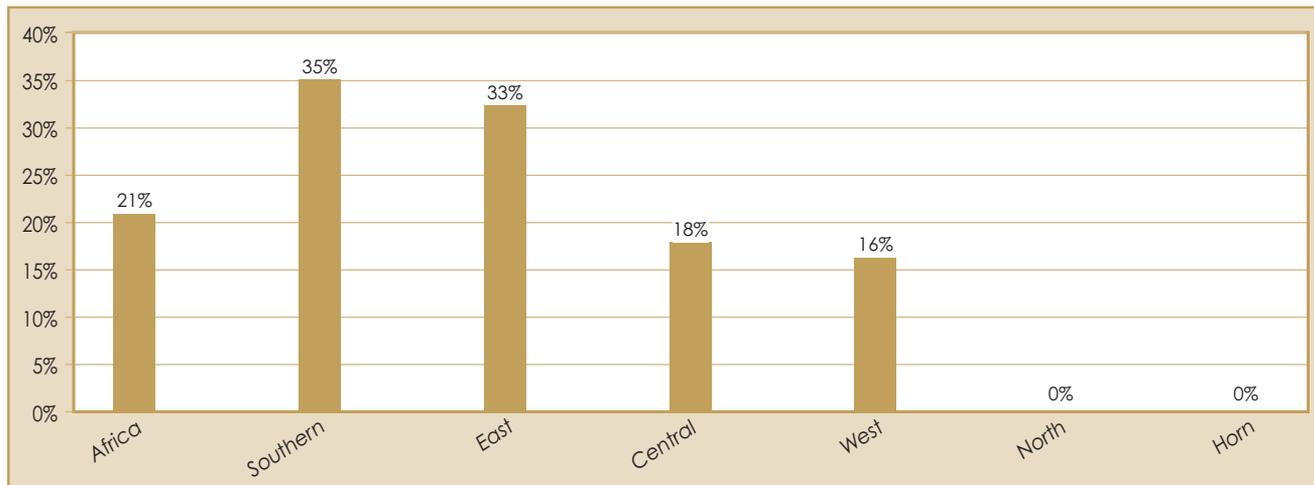
legislating, entering into bilateral agreements, treaties and signing international Human Rights Instruments are in accordance with the Constitution. The Speaker represents Parliament during the signing of international treaties, conventions and declarations.

Women speakers have the opportunity to shape their Parliaments, both in the way they operate and in their outputs. They can enhance Parliaments' role in overseeing government work in the area of gender equality, provide space for effective Women's Parliamentary Caucuses, and foster partnerships between men and women Parliamentarians in effecting legal and institutional reforms on gender equality. They also serve as role models for fellow women who aspire to top decision-making positions in their respective countries.

<sup>13</sup> Athumani, H., 'Uganda's Only Female Presidential Candidate Says Leadership Needs to Change' 11 January 2021 <<https://www.voanews.com/africa/ugandas-only-female-presidential-candidate-says-leadership-needs-change>> accessed 3 March 2021

<sup>14</sup> Wikipedia, Nancy Kalembe <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nancy\\_Kalembe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nancy_Kalembe)> accessed 3 March 2021

Figure 7.2: Women Speakers in Africa by region



Source: Compiled by Gender Link with information from parliament websites see Annex 14.

Of the 73 Speakers of Parliament, 15 (21%) are women. Southern Africa has the most women Speakers, with eight of the 23 positions (35%) held by women. North Africa and the Horn have no women Speakers.

## Reflections of the first female Speaker in Uganda



Rebecca Kadaga.

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 women's struggle 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 emancipation and empowerment - I felt that it was my duty to join politics and influence decision making for the improvement of women's lives in Kamuli District in particular and Uganda in general.

A new Constitution was enacted in 1995, with gender-related provisions being included. The country holds presidential, parliamentary, and local government elections every 5 years. Uganda also conforms to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which ensures 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 commonly referred to as affirmative action, which was also later integrated into the Republic of Uganda's Constitution in 1995.

Of course, joining politics at that time was not easy for me as a woman. There were, and there 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 strongly willed, of course, helped. However, it is the overwhelming support of the people of Kamuli District that propels in me.

My political party - the NRM, of which I am 2nd National Vice-Chairperson has been instrumental in my journey in politics. As I have mentioned earlier, it is 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, there is no special provision for the protection of women during electoral processes. This has been one factor that really hinders women's participation in electoral processes in Uganda. Violence against women during campaigns and elections is still a deterrent factor towards women's participation in electoral processes.

Of course, as women leaders, we have done our best to push for the emancipation of women 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 that if well implemented; we think can protect women's rights and 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% which is far off the 50% target. Unfortunately, this is not the case with Uganda alone but with many other countries because only two countries have achieved gender parity globally. We need to empower women through policy reforms education, and changing attitudes in our societies. We need increased funding for women in our parties, and we need to create more women advocacy groups at the grass root level to push the agenda.

*Interview with Rebecca Kadaga (MP), first woman Speaker of Uganda, January 2017. at a Consultative Conference on the Commonwealth Handbook for Gender Inclusive Elections in Africa.*

## Women in Cabinet

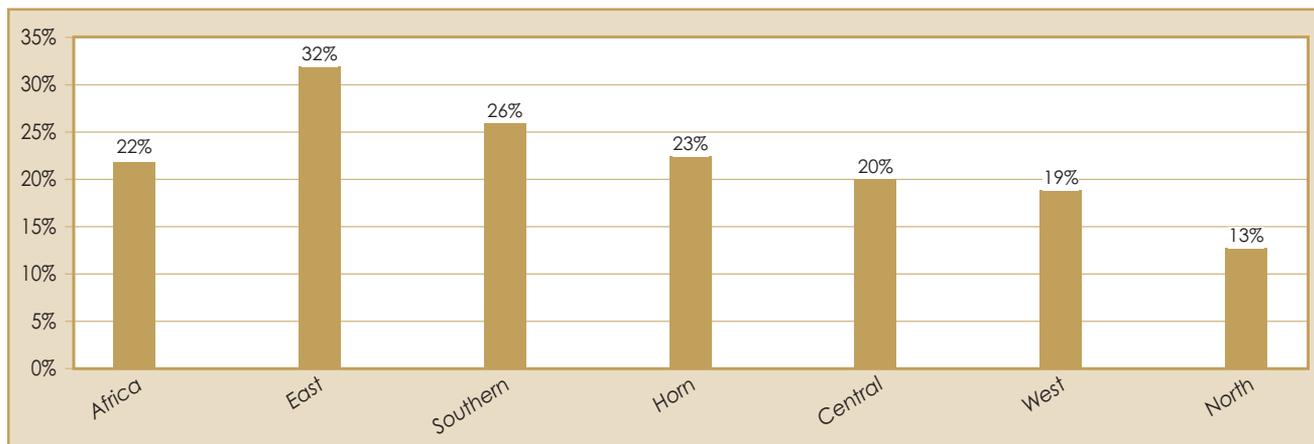
Cabinet members are the highest-ranking officials in the Executive, usually referred to as Ministers. The role of cabinet depends on whether the country uses a parliamentary system e.g. South Africa or a presidential system e.g. Uganda. In the parliamentary system cabinet collectively decides the government's direction, especially regarding legislation passed by the parliament. In countries with a presidential system, the Cabinet does not perform this function, their primary role is as an official advisory council to the head of government.<sup>15</sup> Cabinet sizes in Africa

range from 10 ministers in the Comoros to 49 in the DRC.

The Cabinet is one area in which governments can make rapid progress in achieving gender parity, as the President appoints members. High proportions of women in cabinet are an indication of political will at the highest level. This is one area in which heads of state committed to gender equality have the power to bring about change in a relatively short period.

<sup>15</sup> Wikipedia, Cabinet (government) <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet\\_\(government\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabinet_(government))> accessed 14 March 2021

Figure 7.3: Women in Cabinet in Africa by region

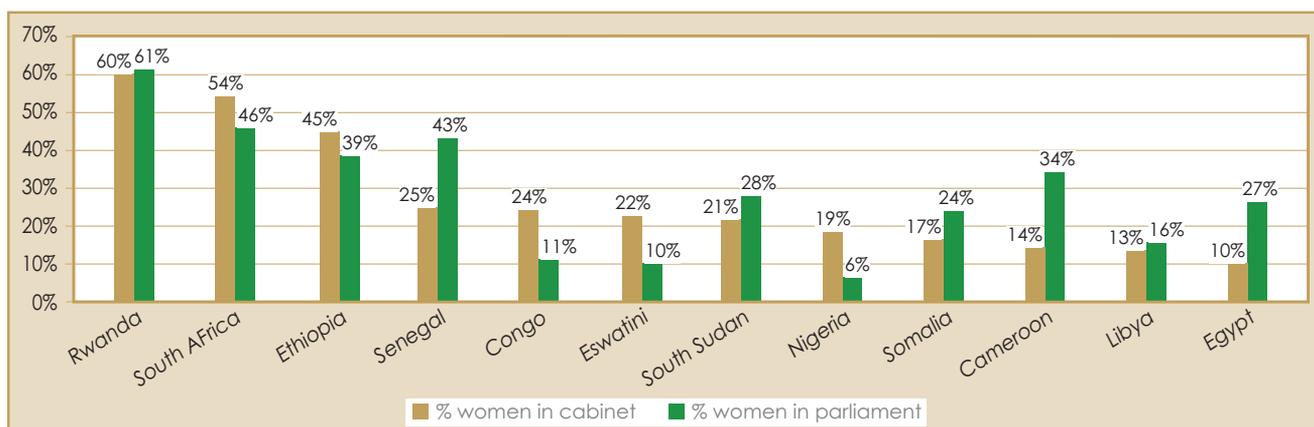


Source: Compiled by GL with information from government websites see Annex 17.

Figure 7.3 shows that women are still under-represented in Cabinets across Africa, with only 22% of these positions being occupied by women. East Africa has the highest proportion of women in cabinet (32%). North Africa has the lowest (13%). All 54 African countries have at least one woman cabinet minister. Representation of women in African cabinets ranges from 7% in Equatorial Guinea to 60% in Rwanda.

The low levels of women in Cabinet positions raises concerns about the political will of heads of state to increase women's representation in decision-making. Rwanda and South Africa have more than 50% women in Cabinet - 60% and 54% respectively, which correlates with their high representation in Parliament. This shows the commitment by Presidents in those countries to gender parity.

Figure 7.4: Women in Cabinet vs Parliament in select African countries



Source: Compiled by Gender Links with information from government websites.

Figure 7.4 illustrates that six of 12 countries in different regions of Africa (Rwanda, Senegal, South Sudan, Somalia, Cameroon, Libya, Egypt) have more women in Parliament than in the Cabinet. Except Egypt, all of these countries have some

form of quota, either constitutional/legislated or voluntary party. Conversely, in South Africa, Ethiopia, Congo (Brazzaville), Eswatini and Nigeria there are more women in Cabinet. Interestingly aside from South Africa and Ethiopia, the other

three countries have the lowest representation of women in Parliament.



In **Senegal** the contrast between Parliament and Cabinet is stark. Senegal has 43% women in Parliament. The country ranks fourth in the region on this metric. This is not matched in other top posts. The cabinet comprises of only eight women, on a total of 32 ministers (25%). At the local level women comprise 13 out of 557 mayors (23%). The National Autonomous Electoral

Committee (CENA) has only four women out of 12 members (33%). All of them are political nominees since they are named by presidential decree.

The world over women predominates in the so-called *soft* portfolios, such a gender and women's affairs, health, culture and education. However, there is growing evidence of stereotypes being challenged as women are appointed to non-traditional portfolios such as defense and justice.

Table 7.2: Gender Division of Laour in selected African countries

Country	Region	Economic/ planning	Foreign/Justice/ Security	Social	Women in cabinet	% women in parliament
Rwanda	East	67%	0%	80%	60%	61%
South Africa	Southern	53%	50%	60%	54%	46%
Ethiopia	Horn	33%	50%	75%	45%	39%
Senegal	West	32%	0%	22%	25%	43%
Congo	Central	17%	0%	67%	24%	11%
Eswatini	Southern	8%	33%	67%	22%	10%
South Sudan	East	6%	29%	50%	21%	28%
Nigeria	West	13%	0%	36%	19%	6%
Somalia	Horn	14%	0%	40%	17%	24%
Cameroon	Central	0%	20%	29%	14%	34%
Libya	North	0%	0%	29%	13%	16%
Egypt	North	9%	0%	14%	10%	27%
<b>Overall</b>		<b>23%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>27%</b>	

Source: Gender Links, with data from Annex 18.

Table 7.2 shows that in the 12 selected countries from different regions of Africa, women dominate in the social portfolios (including women's and youth affairs, health, education and culture). Women comprise 34% of the ministers in these portfolios. Just 23% of ministerial positions in the economic and planning portfolios are women. Women are least represented in the justice and security portfolios (including defense, safety and security, foreign affairs), with just 14% of ministers being women. Seven of the 12 countries have no women in these portfolios. There are, however, some examples of where this trend is changing. For example in South Africa and Ethiopia, women

occupy half of the foreign/justice/security portfolios.



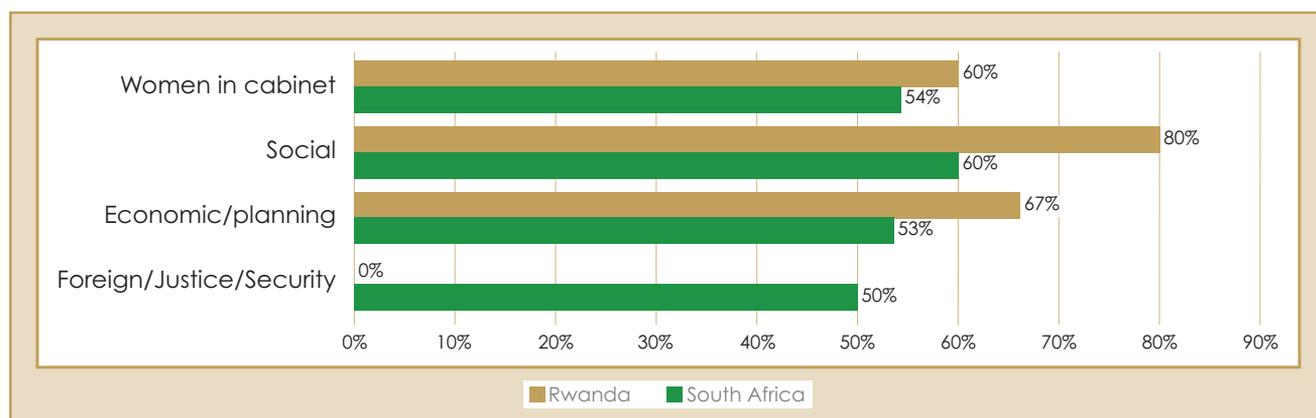
**Ethiopia** has made commendable progress in women's representation in Parliament over the last 20 years, increasing from eight per cent in 2000 to 39% in 2020. The ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) (now Prosperity Party) has adopted a 30% voluntary party quota. In a cabinet reshuffle in 2018 representation of women increased from 18% to 45%<sup>16</sup>, showing Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's commitment to women in decision-

<sup>16</sup> Burke, J., 'Women win half of Ethiopia's cabinet roles in reshuffle' The Guardian, 16 October 2018 < <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/16/women-win-half-of-ethiopia-s-cabinet-roles-in-reshuffle> accessed 2 March 2021. Note figure is different because of various cabinet reshuffle since 2018, 45% is based on most recent information

making. He also appointed 50% women to the security and justice portfolios, naming women as the Attorney General and Minister of Peace.<sup>17</sup> This is noteworthy given the past and current conflict in the country. Some sceptics however question the motives behind these appointments, arguing that leaders just want to appear to be doing the

right thing. “It allows leaders with authoritarian leanings, or dubious democratic credentials, to expand their support base and bolster political stability. The recent reforms in both Ethiopia and Egypt could well be the product of such strategies, rather than a genuine commitment to promoting gender equality”.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 7.5: Gender in the South African and Rwanda Cabinets

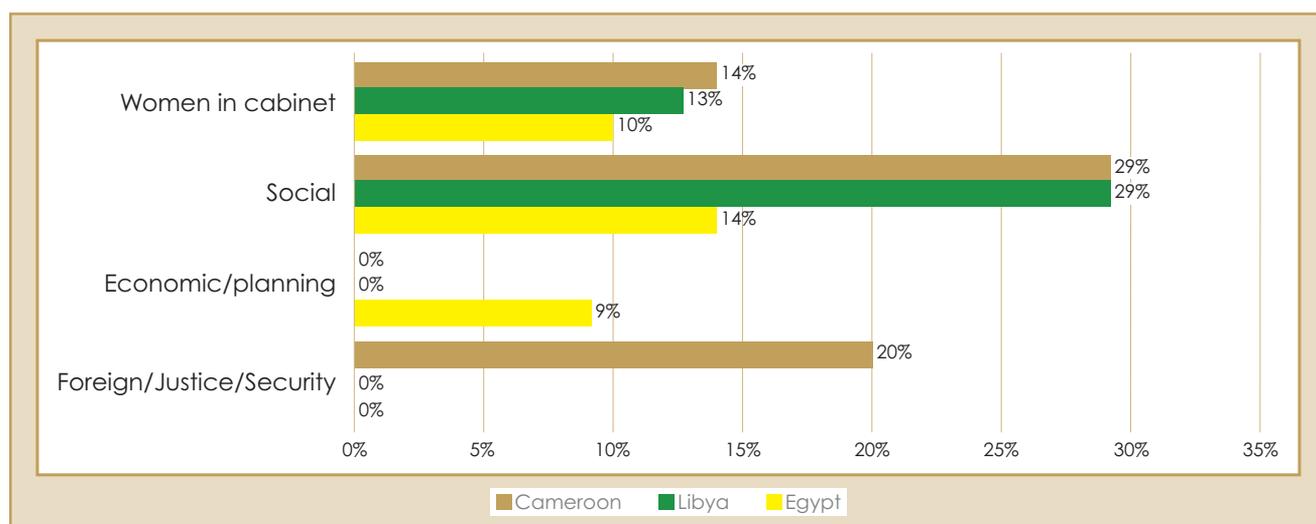


Source: Gender Links with data from Annex 18.

Rwanda and South Africa are the only two countries in Africa with over 50% women in Cabinet. Figure 7.5 shows that here too, women dominate in the social portfolios. However they are also in the majority in the economic/planning

portfolios. Rwanda has no women in the foreign, justice, and security portfolios. However, in South Africa women comprise 50% of those in these traditionally male-dominated portfolios.

Figure 7.6: Gender in African cabinets less than 15%



Source: Gender Links with data from Annex 18.

<sup>17</sup> See Annex 18

<sup>18</sup> Dodsworth, S., How more women politicians in Africa can make a real difference, Weforum, 27 February 2019 <<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/02/women-politicians-in-africa-face-huge-odds-but-can-make-a-real-difference>> accessed 2 March 2021

Figure 7.6 shows that in countries with less than 15% women in Cabinet, only Cameroon has women in the foreign, justice, and security portfolios. The majority of ministers in these countries are in the social portfolios, and only Egypt has a woman in the economic and planning portfolios.

Africa is a young population. According to the United Nations, 226 million youth aged 15-24 lived in Africa in 2015, representing nearly 20% of Africa's population, making up one-fifth of the

world's youth population. If the age bracket is widened to include all people aged below 35, this number increases to three-quarters of Africa's population. The share of Africa's youth in the world is forecasted to increase to 42% by 2030<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, it is imperative that policies and strategies are put in place to ensure the inclusion of youth in political decision-making so that their views are heard and taken into account when developing policies and programmes. There is growing recognition of the role that youth can play in governance and political decision-making.

## Young women coming into cabinet



In the last two years, three women, aged 35 or younger, have been appointed to Cabinets in Angola, Botswana and Namibia. What is more encouraging is that these young women have not been appointed to the traditional, 'soft' portfolios to which women are often appointed.

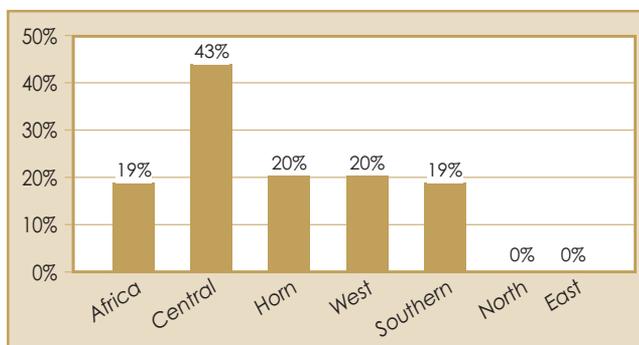
Bogolo Kenewendo was only 29 when she was appointed Minister of Investment, Trade and industry in Botswana in 2018. In 2019 Vera Daves da Sousa, 35, became Angola's Finance Minister. She has the task of reviving Angola's oil-based economy, which has experienced its worst recession since civil war ended in 2002. Emma Theofelus, 23, became Namibia's Information, Communication and Technology Deputy Minister in April 2020 weeks after the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

## Top women in Local Government

Women comprise 21% of those elected to local government level and 19% of Mayors of capital cities. Of the 54 capital cities in Africa, only 10 are led by women.

Figure 7.7 shows that Central Africa has the highest proportion of women Mayors of capital cities. Of the seven capitals, three are led by women. In North and East Africa, there are no women Mayors of capital cities. The Horn, West and Southern Africa all sit at the Africa average of 19% or slightly above, at 20%.

Figure 7.7: Women mayors in capital cities in Africa by region



Source: Compiled by GL with information from capital city websites see Annex 15.

<sup>19</sup> Office of the special advisor of Africa, Youth empowerment  
<https://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/peace/youth.shtml#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20United%20Nations%2C%2022%26%20million%20youth%20aged%2015,of%20the%20world's%20youth%20population>  
 Accessed 14 March 2021

## Women making a difference

Thenjiwe Mtinso's model (1997) posits that once women gain entry to and can participate effectively, change will follow. Transformation takes many forms. Institutional change concerns the extent to which parliaments, political parties, EMBs etc become more gender friendly. Change is also measured in new discourse, services, laws and policies. The Commonwealth Secretariat notes that the entry of women into parliament leads to issues such as abortion, domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, single

parenthood, and women's health entering the parliamentary agenda.<sup>20</sup>

The Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) Plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments is designed to support parliaments in their efforts to become more gender-responsive. It presents a broad range of strategies in seven action areas. In line with the plan of action IPU developed a self-assessment tool for evaluating gender sensitivity of parliaments.

### **IPU describes a gender-sensitive parliament<sup>21</sup> as one that:**

1. Promotes and achieves equality in numbers of women and men across all of its bodies and internal structures.
2. Develops a gender equality policy framework suited to its own national parliamentary context.
3. Mainstreams gender equality throughout all of its work.
4. Fosters an internal culture that respects women's rights, promotes gender equality and responds to the needs and realities of MPs - men and women - to balance work and family responsibilities.
5. Acknowledges and builds on the contribution made by its men members who pursue and advocate for gender equality.
6. Encourages political parties to take a proactive role in the promotion and achievement of gender equality.
7. Equips its parliamentary staff with the capacity and resources to promote gender equality, actively encourages the recruitment and retention of women to senior positions, and ensures that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the work of the parliamentary administration.

### **Action area 1**

#### **Increase the number of women in parliament and achieve equality in participation**

Increasing access to parliament through gender-sensitive changes will help increase the number of women parliamentarians, which can in turn prompt the further implementation of the principles of gender sensitivity.

### **Action area 2**

#### **Strengthen gender equality legislation and policy**

Parliaments can become more gender-sensitive by implementing legislation and policies that support the principles of gender equality. The introduction of gender equality and gender mainstreaming legislation can be an effective catalyst for social and cultural change in attitudes towards gender equality.

<sup>20</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat, *Women in Politics: Voices from the Commonwealth* (London, Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999)

<sup>21</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments* (IPU, 2017) p.11

### **Action area 3**

#### **Mainstream gender equality throughout all parliamentary work**

Gender mainstreaming is a process that recognizes the economic, social, political and legal differences that exist between women and men. Gender inequality can be tackled effectively only if policies in all areas are designed in such a way as to address the specific concerns, needs and constraints of both women and men while building on their respective capacities and contributions.

### **Action area 4**

#### **Institute or improve gender-sensitive infrastructure and parliamentary culture**

Parliaments are like any other workplace, and as such, should serve as a model for society by upholding the principles of gender sensitivity through the provision of family-friendly policies and infrastructure, and the implementation of policies related to the prevention of discrimination and harassment, and policies on the equitable distribution of parliamentary resources and facilities.

### **Action area 5**

#### **Ensure that responsibility for gender equality is shared by all parliamentarians - men and women**

The realization of a gender-sensitive parliament, based on the ultimate goal of gender equality in all its structures, methods and work, will not take place without the support and involvement of men parliamentarians. Changing social values and heightening gender awareness among men have resulted in stronger partnerships between men and women on gender equality.

### **Action area 6**

#### **Encourage political parties to be champions of gender equality**

Political parties are often the dominant form of political organization and the mechanism through which women and men pursue a legislative agenda with respect to the achievement of gender equality. Parliaments should encourage political parties to increase the number of women in their ranks by instituting gender-sensitive meeting arrangements and work practices, developing gender mainstreaming mechanisms and equitably allocating parliamentary committee positions among men and women.

### **Action area 7**

#### **Enhance the gender sensitivity of, and gender equality among, parliamentary staff**

Gender-sensitive parliaments are champions of gender equality, not only for their members, but also for the many staff who support them. Parliamentary administrations need to review their workplace culture and infrastructure, and act to ensure that all staff are able to support parliament in achieving its gender equality goals. In this respect, parliaments and their administration.

*This section is taken from Inter-Parliamentary Union, Plan of Action for gender-sensitive parliaments (2017)*

Transformation is, however, difficult to measure. “The actual impact women parliamentarians can make will depend on a number of variables that vary from country to country. These include the economic and political context in which the assembly functions, the background, experience and number of the women in parliament, and the parliamentary process rules. Each of these factors has a significant bearing on the extent to which women MPs can make a difference once elected. Because these factors vary significantly from country to country, it is difficult to make generalisations that are universally relevant regarding how women MPs can maximise their impact.”<sup>22</sup>

The impact of increased numbers of women in parliament is questioned in an article, *Political Empowerment of Women in Africa: Influence or Number?* Maty Konte and Victor Osei Kwadwo argue that while women's political representation has increased significantly over the last decade, the influence that this has had on policy is questionable: “Women's representation in political parties, the legislative and executive arms of government, and at points of crisis matter, but what matters most is how these numbers translate into improving policy content and direction. Comparing women's cabinet appointments to the percentage of budget managed, on average women with cabinet

positions manage a relatively low proportion (18.9%) of budgets. This is evidence that strides made in increasing the number of women in politics in Africa is at best only symbolic and at worst, redundant.”<sup>23</sup>

Some recent studies show that improving the representation of women in parliament has a positive impact on the health sector. Political scientists Amanda Clayton and Pär Zetterberg have shown that large increases in women's parliamentary representation tend to be followed by rises in government spending on public health. “We find that substantial quota shocks—those associated with a large increase in women's parliamentary representation—are followed by increased government expenditures toward public health. Further, we find that increases in health spending are offset by relative decreases in military spending and other spending categories. Our findings provide strong evidence that quota policies influence government priorities in historically feminized policy areas but principally when they are complied with and have substantial numerical consequences.”<sup>24</sup>

As we seek to hone indicators of “effective participation” for further studies, the following qualitative examples show how change is starting to happen in countries with a “critical mass” of women.

<sup>22</sup> Karam, A and Lovenduski, J., *Women in Parliament: Making a difference*, Ballington J and Karam, A eds. “Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers”, A revised edition, (International IDEA, 2005), pp.188

<sup>23</sup> M. Konte & V. Osei Kwadwo, *Political Empowerment of Women in Africa: Influence or Number?* Impakter, 12 November 2019 <<https://impakter.com/political-empowerment-of-women-in-africa-influence-or-number/>> accessed 3 March 2021

<sup>24</sup> Clayton, A and Zetterberg P (2008) Quota Shocks: Electoral Gender Quotas and Government Spending Priorities Worldwide. *The Journal of Politics*, volume 80, number 3. Published online May 10, 2018. p916

## Rwanda, A country where gender equality is obvious



Hundreds of children have celebrated the International Day of the Rights of Children, the 20th November 2020, by taking part of the 14th Summit for Children in the Rwandese Parliament.  
Photo: Deborah-Giraneza Twahirwa

Rwanda has the highest proportion of women in Parliament (61%) and Cabinet (60%) globally. It is the first country globally with a female majority. Rwandan women have played an instrumental role in rebuilding the country following the 1994 Genocide.

In her book *Rwandan Women Rising*, Swanee Hunt provides a timeline of major historical events and the rise of women's leadership in Rwanda dating back to the 1800's. More recently, since first post-genocide parliamentary election in 2003 when women won 48% of seats, a range of law reform and policy changes have taken place. The country has passed land reform requiring legally married couples to jointly register property; Parliament approved a Gender-Based Violence law mandating strict punishments for all sexual violence, including domestic abuse. Their nine-year basic education policy makes primary school plus three years accessible to all with a particular push for girls.<sup>25</sup> Agathe Uwilingiyimana was the first and up till now, the only women Prime Minister in Rwanda, from the 18th July 1993 up to her murder on the 7th April 1994 at Kigali during the Tutsis genocide.

Equality between men and women has been enshrined in the Constitution since 2003. The Ministry of the Promotion of Gender and the

Family (MIGEPROF) was established to create an enabling environment for the family's stability, equality between the sexes and the protection of the children to reach sustainable development. This key Ministry's mission is to guarantee a secure environment for all family members, empowerment of girls and women, the promotion of non-discrimination, complementarity, and equality between sexes, foster and encourage positive masculinity, and eradicate sexism violence and strengthen family unity and positive parenthood.

A Gender Monitoring Office supports MIGEPROF. Its mandate is to oversee the respect of equality between sexes, promote gender responsibility at all levels, and fight GBV and all the injustice that goes with it. There is a dedicated hotline (5798) that allows a victim of gender-based violence to get psychological assistance from a specialized councilor in the field. Legal counselling is offered and there is monitoring to ensure the efficiency of the service offered.

The government of Rwanda has made childhood development one of its priority. The Childhood Development Policy was adopted in 2016 to guarantee a holistic development of the child and it takes into account the health, physical, social and emotional aspects of the child's growth. Thanks to the introduction of policies in parallel with other programs in the educational sector, the status of education for girls has considerably improved at primary, secondary and tertiary level. Parity has remained stable at primary and secondary level with respectively an actual schooling rate for girls at 49.7% and 53.2% whilst it is estimated that at tertiary level, young women were at 42.6% in 2018. Besides, the percentage of handicapped girls who pursue their studies has increased at 43.6% at the primary level and 47.8% at the secondary level.

<sup>25</sup> Hunt, S., *Rwandan Women Rising* (Duke University Press, 2017)

The Rwandan Defense Force (RDF) also has a policy of recruiting more women in the armed forces and implementing government preventive measures against GBV is the RDF's priority, as for the Rwanda National Police, and women soldiers play an important role in engaging in dialogues with women in all regions and districts.

While this progress is something that should be celebrated, critics warn that it should be considered alongside the country's weaker position on gender inequality indexes. While ranked first in terms of women's representation in parliament, Rwanda only ranks 158th in the United Nations' Gender Inequality Index. This index considers inequality in terms of reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. "These figures speak more to the realities for women at all levels in Rwanda

and reflect that Rwanda's high representation of women in parliament is not guaranteed to translate into transformation that benefits all women."<sup>26</sup> There are also some critics, who have cautioned against lauding a regime that could be using token representation to distract from its shift towards authoritarianism. The country still has a long way to go in achieving gender equality that translates into meaningful empowerment of all women.<sup>27</sup>

Hunt notes that while some argue that President Kagame has used political will to promote women because they are generally more moderate and less inclined to advocate violence, he has not made that claim. "The President has noted in interviews that women often exceed their male counterparts in terms of responsibility, diligence, and lack of egotism, qualities that are the spine of solid leadership".<sup>28</sup>

*Source : Deborah-Giraneza Twahirwa with contribution from Gender Links*



The late Meherzia Labidi Maïza was elected to the **Tunisian** Constituent Assembly in October 2011, and was appointed the First Deputy Speaker of the Assembly after receiving 142 out of the 214 votes. Labidi-Maïza organised the debates that gave birth to Tunisia's new Constitution. She ensured that women's rights were included in Article 45 of the Constitution. The post Arab Spring Constitution contained clauses that her supporters did not like, but she said, "it's like giving birth: painful, but in the end, everyone is happy when the child arrives". Labidi-Maïza was elected to the Assembly of People's Representatives in the parliamentary election in October 2014, in the second level district of Nabeul in north-east

Tunisia. In 2015 she led the Committee of Women, Family, Children and the Elderly.<sup>29</sup>

With increased understanding the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), women MPs are raising these issues, which are still resisted in many African parliaments.



Regina Esprano, an MP in **Seychelles** has worked to set up a committee in parliament for SRHR, and with help of the SADC Parliamentary Forum (PF) secured funding to reach key populations. They have had sessions with girls in schools on SRHR and condom use, and are raising awareness on the dangers of HIV and

<sup>26</sup> Lorimer, S., *Does the high representation of women in parliament in Rwanda translate to meaningful empowerment of women?* IRM, 13 October 2020 <<https://innovativeresearchmethods.org/does-the-high-representation-of-women-in-parliament-in-rwanda-translate-to-meaningful-empowerment-of-women-copy/>> accessed 3 March 2021

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>28</sup> Hunt, S., *Rwandan Women Rising* (Duke University Press, 2017)

<sup>29</sup> UN Women, "From where I stand: "Women have to be at the heart of the Africa of tomorrow"" 25 July 2017 <<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/7/from-where-i-stand-mehrezia-maiza-labidi>> accessed 3 March 2021

AIDS and how to promote good health and responsible reproductive health. She says “there is a need to change policy to ensure that young girls can access contraceptives so they can

continue their education, prevent HIV and AIDS, and unwanted pregnancies leading to a brighter future.”<sup>30</sup>

## Taking gender activism to the international arena

Like former President of Argentina, Michelle Bachelet and former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, African women ministers are moving to high positions in inter-governmental organisations. In these influential positions African women are shining a spotlight on the “big” policy agendas for gender and the SDGs.



**Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women** started out as a South African MP during the country's first democratic government from 1994 to 1996. She served as Minister of Minerals and Energy and Deputy Minister in the

Department of Trade and Industry and was Deputy President of South Africa from 2005-2008. She has served in her current post since 2013.

Early on in the pandemic Mlambo-Ngcuka drew attention to the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In a statement on 20 March 2020 she acknowledged how the pandemic was 'exposing deficiencies public and private arrangements that currently function only if women play multiple and underpaid roles'.<sup>31</sup>

She added “This is a moment for governments to recognize both the enormity of the contribution women make and the precarious nature of so many. This includes a focus on sectors where women are over-represented and underpaid, such as daily wage earners, small business owners,

those working in cleaning, caring, cashiering and catering sectors and in the informal economy.”<sup>32</sup>

Mlambo-Ngcuka applauded the efforts of governments which were taking extraordinary measures to stop the spread of infections. And she acknowledged the strong leadership of women in providing well targeted response, from Chancellor Merkel and Prime Minister Solberg addressing national anxieties, to Prime Minister Ardern highlighting welfare in her economic measures. There is a growing body of literature<sup>33</sup> arguing that countries with women leaders have fared better in responding to the COVID 19 pandemic.

In an interview with Thomson Reuters Foundation in February 2021<sup>34</sup>, Mlambo-Ngcuka said countries must put more women into leadership roles to build a stronger post-pandemic world. She also emphasises how important role models are for young and aspiring politicians. Referring to Kamala Harris' appointment as the first female U.S. vice president, she said, “It does help if a big country breaks the mould. It pushes other countries forward.” She believes Harris, who is of Indian and Jamaican heritage, is as particularly important role model for young women of colour, she said “They now have someone who looks like them, who they can identify with” Mlambo-Ngcuka has also been a role model to younger women, she says “It was such a fulfilling feeling to hear young women (saying) 'Wow, this is on the table. I can also go for this'”.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Gender Links interview < [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_s1YzluhEPY&t=5s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_s1YzluhEPY&t=5s) > accessed 2 March 2021

<sup>31</sup> UN Women, COVID-19: *Women front and centre* Statement by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary-General and UN Women Executive Director 20 March 2020 < <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/3/statement-ed-phumzile-covid-19-women-front-and-centre> > accessed 14 March 2021

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>33</sup> <https://blogs.prio.org/2020/04/womens-leadership-could-enhance-global-recovery-from-covid-19/>  
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/06/08/how-iceland-beat-the-coronavirus>  
<https://theconversation.com/what-coronavirus-success-of-taiwan-and-iceland-has-in-common-140455>

<https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28815/the-importance-of-gender-inclusion-in-covid-19-responses>,

<sup>34</sup> Batha, E., *Want a stronger world after COVID-19? Choose more women leaders*, Reuters, 1 February 2021 < <https://www.reuters.com/article/global-women-politics-idUSL8N2K262V> > accessed 3 March 2021

<sup>35</sup> Batha, E., *Want a stronger world after COVID-19? Choose more women leaders*, Reuters, 1 February 2021 < <https://www.reuters.com/article/global-women-politics-idUSL8N2K262V> > accessed 3 March 2021

## Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Head the World Trade Organization (WTO)

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is the first woman and first African to head the World Trade Organization (WTO), an intergovernmental organisation regulating and facilitating international trade between nations. Okonjo-Iweala had an esteemed career from her struggle beginnings when she worked as a cook for rebels on the frontlines in the 1967-70 civil war between Nigeria and Igbo-dominated Biafra. She was an economist at the World Bank for 25 years and the first Minister of Finance in Nigeria for two terms from 2003-2006, 2011-2015.<sup>36</sup>

Her legacy includes strengthening the country's public financial systems and stimulating the housing sector to establish the Mortgage Refinance Corporation (NMRC). She also empowered women and youth with the Growing Girls and Women in Nigeria Programme (GWIN), a gender-responsive budgeting system, and the highly acclaimed Youth Enterprise with Innovation programme (YouWIN); to support entrepreneurs that created thousands of jobs.<sup>37</sup>

## Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter shows that African women are still under-represented in leadership positions, from 22% in Cabinets to just 7% in top executive posts. The discourse on women in political-decision making is moving *beyond numbers to making a difference*. “Quantitative and qualitative arguments for women's equal participation in decision-making are not absolute nor are they mutually exclusive. The two go hand in hand. There are legitimate equity arguments for

demanding women's participation in decision-making whether they make a difference or not.”<sup>38</sup>

More qualitative research is required with African women politicians and experts to uncover exactly what difference women make to politics. While men in decision-making are not judged in the same critical way, this evidence will make a stronger case, if this is in question, for women's equal representation in all areas of decision-making.

## Recommendations

### To leaders:

- Cabinet is one area in which governments could make rapid progress as members are appointed by the President. Leaders should ensure gender balance in cabinet appointments, as well as ensure that all interest groups are represented.
- Where a presidential candidate is a male, he should nominate a female running mate, and vice-versa.

### To women politicians:

- Document experiences - women politicians should write and tell their stories of successes and challenges to build up a body of literature that can be used to continuously make the case for increasing women's representation in decision-making bodies.
- Be role models and mentor young aspiring women politicians.

<sup>36</sup> Campbell, J, 'Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala: A Well-Qualified New Leader for the WTO' Council on foreign relations, 17 february 2021 <<https://www.cfr.org/blog/ngozi-okonjo-iweala-well-qualified-new-leader-wto> accessed 3 March 2021>

<sup>37</sup> Wikipedia, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ngozi\\_Okonjo-Iweala](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ngozi_Okonjo-Iweala)> accessed 3 March 2021

<sup>38</sup> Lowe Morna, C., *Ring up the Changes*, (Gender Links, 2004) pp.249

- Forge alliances with civil society, particularly WROs who can provide technical support and capacity building on campaigning, law reform and policy development.
- Establish multi-party women's caucuses to deliberate on issues of gender outside of traditional political party structures.

### To WROs:

- Develop indicators for measuring “effective participation”. These include the extent to which women raise their voice in decision-making structures; the issues they raise; services, laws and policies that change as result of these

interventions; changes in the attitudes of men towards gender issues; follow up, monitoring and evaluation of these changes.

- Conduct research and document women's experience and participation in governance and political processes, by working with women politicians to document their experiences and learnings.
- Upscale capacity building for women in politics and leadership to strengthen knowledge, information and gender analysis capacities of women at all levels of decision-making, i.e. MPs, ministers, councilors, mayors, to give them confidence to retain their seats and inspire other women to participate in politics.



Speaking out at a political gathering in Eswatini.

Photo: Thando Dlamini