

At the Coalface: Gender and Local Government in Southern Africa

A key finding of *Ringling Up the Changes* conducted in 2003/04 was that local government is a missing ingredient in the gender and governance discourse.

Over a year in the making the study, which took place in four countries (Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia and South Africa), included interviews and discussions with a total of 946 people from 69 local authorities and observing 41 council meetings in the four countries.

The study included the country with highest level (58 percent) of women in local government in the region (Lesotho) and the country (Mauritius) with one of the lowest levels (6.4 percent). Namibia and South Africa have between 40 and 42 percent women in local government. All of the case study countries have different electoral systems and approaches to quotas.

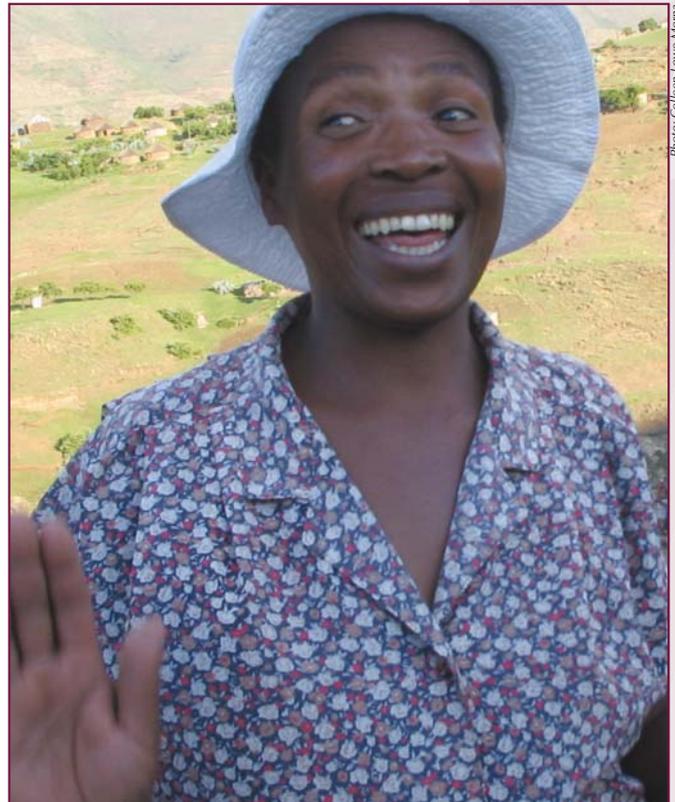
A key finding of the research is that irrespective of the political and electoral backgrounds, if there is political will gender parity in local government can be achieved and there is no longer any excuse for any country in the region not to achieve this goal. However, a lot more needs to be done to ensure that women are able to participate effectively and make a difference at the local level. A key conclusion of the report is that unless gender is systematically mainstreamed into the work of local government, increased representation of women at local level may become a case of “jobs for the girls” rather than gender equality for the region.

At the Coalface: Gender and Local Government in Southern Africa was launched on 22 March 2007, in collaboration with SALGA Gauteng at an event which brought together approximately 150 key stakeholders, including local government councillors from the Gauteng province as well as key partners involved in the research and other partners from the Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance.

The partnership with SALGA is integral to the future plans of the governance project in South Africa, which include dissemination of the research linked to capacity building around gender mainstreaming in local government, and to ensure that local government authorities are involved in the comprehensive follow up plans.

Outputs

- Four comparative case studies of approaches to increasing the representation of women in local government.
- Practical recommendations and strategies for countries seeking to rapidly increase women’s representation at local level in a way the minimises conflict and enhances good governance.
- Recommendations for increasing the effective participation of women, and good governance, in countries that have achieved a higher representation of women at local level.



Matau Moreki, a counselor

Outcomes

- Advancing the SADC and Gender 2005 campaign.
- Contribution to an important new area of the gender and governance discourse.

Next Steps

- Launch *At the Coalface: Gender and Local Government* in all case study countries. Launches to be officiated by ministers, senior government officials.
- Conduct five-day workshop with Ministry of Local government, local government association, and key councillors from each district on mainstreaming gender in the work of local government.
- Agree on roll out of gender action plans to all Councils.
- Media coverage and awareness raising on gender and local government.
- Develop a simple training kit and templates for mainstreaming gender in local government based on pilot projects.
- Train in-country facilitators to support the development of gender action plans in each district.
- Roll out gender action plans in all districts in the four “at the Coalface countries.”
- Replicate the above process in four new countries each year over the next two years.