

Strengthening Gender Equality in Decision Making in Public Administration in Zambia

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ABSTRACT

Achieving significant women representation in decision making positions in public administration has been identified as key step towards achieving gender equality. Gender equality is regarded as a top priority to any institution, not because equality between men and women is an important developmental goal, but because both men and women's participation in activities that affect them and the nation leads to growth as well as development. Women represent more than half of the world's population, have talent, are human capital and their productivity is equal to that of men, such that their absence in decision making affects the operations of various institutions. With a female Vice-President appointed to the second highest office in Zambia, Zambia is still one of the poorest ranked countries on the Gender Equality Index. Women in Zambia face numerous obstacles in their everyday lives especially participating in decision making. The country's strong patriarchal culture and the domination of formal and informal institutions by men partly explains this. Balanced representation of both men and women in decision making is not only important but it is equally essential to have women dispersed throughout different sectors of administrative governance and have them equitably represented at all levels of decision making. This study examined the gender gaps in public administration and focused on how gender equality can be strengthened thereby contributing to the development of tracking mechanisms for gender equality in this sector. The study was based primarily on desk research (analysis of studies, reports and academic publications, policy documents, declarations and media articles) and most importantly built on in-depth interviews with key experts, government representatives and civil society organizations. Therefore, bearing in mind the key barriers that women face in society, the study analyzed whether the recommendations given as well as existence of various legal frameworks leads to increased gender equality in the country or not.

Key terms: Gender equality, public administration, decision making, women

INTRODUCTION

Women's increased participation in decision making contributes to positive transformative processes for societies, such as changes in laws, policies, services, institutions and social norms (Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy, 2014-2017). Women's active participation in decision making is not only important for ensuring equality, but also for establishing their right, addressing various problems and challenges they face in society. According to Domingo et al (2015), women's voice, access to, or participation in decision making will lead them to have actual influence over decisions and outcomes. Second that women will influence and champion issues of concern to women including gender equality. However, women are underrepresented world over especially in key decision making positions. They are

underrepresented at decision making levels in all institutions including the Executive, Legislature, Local government, Quasi-Government institutions, political parties, the private sector, religious bodies and traditional establishments. This is despite many countries having gender policies in place that are to implement and promote gender equality.

Decision making and development are related concepts which go hand in hand as citizens categorized by sex, religion, tribe or color must be involved in decision making for this development to occur. In developing countries, gender equality and development are intertwined; more gender equality creates the conditions to boost economic development and contributes to economic growth, while more development leads to more gender equality (Duflo, 2012). Gender inequality is taken as a common issue of the developing countries as women in these countries are usually tacit and their voice has been hushed due to inherent economic and cultural factors. Therefore, without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved (Beijing Platform for Action, Critical Area G. Para 181). Further, the sustainability of an economy depends on the extent of the integration of women in public decision making and the inclusion of their needs and interests in policy (Husain and Siddiqui, 2002) which ultimately helps to ensure good governance.

Over the years, as noted by Nasser (2017), there seems to be more focus on women's participation to political positions as an indicator of access to decision making and very little attention given to gender equality in public administration. Public administration determines the manner in which political and economic decisions are implemented and how budgets are planned and executed. Therefore, gender equality in public administration is crucial as a gender sensitive public administration is bound to convert policies into outcomes differently. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2015), public administration is the primary institution responsible for implementing national policies, programs and tasks in which women should be included equally. It is the single largest employer; ensuring gender balance in participation and leadership, adopting and implementing legal and policy frameworks that support gender equality, and building inclusive institutional cultures which has potential to transform the lives and livelihoods of millions of workers worldwide. Thus, the participation of women in decision making in public administration depends on a complex of factors that are economic, cultural and social and these vary from country to country.

In Zambia, public administration both at central and local levels, reflects the orientation and character of domestic politics. Although women make up 50.5% of Zambia's population as well as the majority of voters, they remain systematically underrepresented especially when it comes to being appointed to decision making positions in public administration. Despite the country signing up to regional and international conventions, the situation of women remains worrying. There has been a growing concern in the recent past among all key stakeholders in the country on the lower levels and number of women's participation in decision making (Ministry of Gender, 2018). As such, effective public institutions that involve both men and women are essential to the achievement of national and local development goals including poverty reduction, inclusive growth and gender equality. Women's participation at all levels of decision making should be considered crucial to improving their representative nature, accountability and quality of democracies, as well as making the policy making agendas more gender sensitive.

BACKGROUND

Public administration is the organization and management of men and materials to achieve the purpose of the government. According to Caiden (1982), public administration refers to the implementation or pronouncements made by recognized public authorities, the organization of enforcement machinery to ensure public conformity and relations between the public and officials appointed to further collective

interests. It includes the organization of public affairs, social purposes and collective decision making, the management of public institutions, public offices and public property and the administration of the public officials, covering attitudes and behaviors as well as actions. Public administration, as a process, consists of the actions involved in effecting the intent or desire of a government and public policy. Therefore, in its broadest sense, public administration denotes the work involved in the actual conduct of governmental affairs, regardless of the particular branch of the government concerned. In its narrowest sense, it denotes the operations of the administrative (executive) branch only. It is thus the continuously active business part of government which is concerned with carrying out the law as made by legislative bodies (or other authoritative agents) and interpreted by courts, through the process of organization and management (Willoughby, 1927).

According to the Council of Europe (2017), public institutions have played a critical role in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through institutional guarantees and laws on gender equality; national gender policies and action plans; establishing ministries of women, and setting quotas or reservations for women in parliaments, local governments decision making bodies and public agencies. A critical component of gender equality in public administration is parity – equal numbers of women and men working and leading in all levels and sectors of public administration. In this vein, special attention must be paid to women's inclusion in decision making positions. Gender parity in public decision making is “a matter of the full enjoyment of human rights and of social justice, and a necessary condition for the better functioning of a democratic society”(Ibid). The call for inclusive and representative public administration reflects the ideal that “elected and appointed positions in public life should reflect the societies from which they are drawn, including the major social cleavages of identity politics, such as those of gender identities and sexual orientations, race, religion, and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, income, education, and social class, and geography and region” (Norris, 2020, p. 12).

Gender equality in public administration is about the creation of institutions and cultures that are inclusive. It is a focal point as well as a cross-cutting principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2019). Specifically Sustainable Development Goal number 5 which focusses on gender equality and empowerment for women and girls, highlighting the need for equal access to economic resources including ownership and control of land and other property and full and effective participation at all levels of decision making (UN, 2015). Thus, as workplaces, public administration must have recruitment, retention and promotion policies that respect human rights, are fair and accessible to all. There must be structures and rules that bolster rather than undermine gender equalities and these must be implemented and enforced. As alluded to by Norris (2020), policies and practices that embrace gender equality must consider ways that sexism and gender bias intersect with other forms of discrimination and marginalization to shape the experiences and outcomes of diverse groups of women and men.

Situation of women in decision making

Gender equality is a cross cutting issue and a fundamental human right (UNDP Report, 2014). It is a basic human right for everyone, whether male or female and also has instrumental value for development. Studies have consistently shown that improving gender equality enhances growth and productivity, improves outcomes for the next generation, and makes political institutions more representative. Since the launch of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action in ensuring gender equality, the world has made great strides towards the realization of gender equality (United Nations International Children's Emergence Fund, 2020). Recently, women's participation in decision making is improving. In a democratic system for instance, it is impossible to say gender equality and the democratic values have applied without considering the role of women in decision making. Nations in their journey of consolidation of democracy highlight the decision making empowerment of women and have adopted international law and conventions to maintain women's decision making participation earthly by subscribing to international protocols such as the United Nations

Charter on human rights and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Gylman, 2008). However, women's level of representation in the most important decision making positions is even lower at both subnational and national levels.

According to Hughes et al., (2021), gender equality in public administration has improved in recent years, but there is still a long way to go. Women's participation in the civil service approaches parity with 46% on average across 139 countries and territories. Yet, significant variation across countries and regions means that only one-third (33%) of countries have reached this goal. At decision making levels of the civil service, women make up only 31% of top leadership positions on average. This is despite the fact that women in governance are necessary to promote gender and income equality to achieve socio-economic emancipation and to realize social justice and equitable development with rapid economic growth. However, there is no comprehensive global baseline through which certain trends can be observed regarding the presence of gender equality in public administration. Around the world, various statistics show that women are underrepresented in positions of decision making; even in countries where women have equal access to education, increased representation in public administration, and in particular in decision making positions, is not always assured. For instance, the gross enrolment rate of women in higher education increased from 19% in 2000 to 43% in 2020, whereas for men it rose more slowly from 19% to 37%. The gender parity index indicates that globally there were 113 women enrolled in higher education for every 100 men in 2020 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics, 2020).

According to the Report of the World Economic Forum (2023), although there has been an increase in the number of women holding political decision making posts worldwide, achieving gender parity remains a distant goal and regional disparities are significant. Following a series of gradual but steady increases in the share of women in leadership roles over the past two decades, this share has edged up to, on average, 33.7% in 2023 from 33.4% in 2022 across public- and private-sector leadership roles. However, high-frequency data presented in the report shows that hiring rates for women into leadership positions across industries have been in decline since mid-2022. Looking at local government for example, data reveals that significant strides have been made in terms of women's representation in local government globally, though disparities remain between countries and regions. Out of the 117 countries with available data since 2017, (UN Women, 2022b), only 18 countries, including Bolivia (50.4%), India (44.4%) and France (42.3%), have achieved representation of women of over 40% in local governance. On the other hand, 24 economies, mostly in the Middle East, North Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa, such as Saudi Arabia (1.2%), Ghana (3.8%), Turkey (10.1%) and Japan (14.31%), have below 15% representation. The remaining 75 economies fall within the 15%-30% range, including diverse nations such as Brazil (15.7%), Indonesia (15.7%), China (28.1%), Ireland (23.9%), Germany (30.3%) and the United Kingdom (35.3%) (WEF, 2023).

The African Gender Index scores show marked differences between the number of men and women in senior and representational positions. The AGI score for the representation and empowerment dimensions is 21.3% (in the range 0 to 1) showing a major gender gap exist. The AGI scores for different countries range between 2.3% and 62.1%. In both the private sector (AGI 22.9% for the top manager of firms) and in public life (AGI 25.3% for parliamentary representation and AGI 26.3% for cabinet ministers), most senior jobs are held by men. The global evidence above shows that greater diversity amongst decision makers matters (African Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ADB/UNECA), 2019). Thus, the exclusion of women in Africa has been established by a long history and could also be traced to tradition, religion and role conception. African women more than others in comparable regions around the world, have suffered repression. Yet, oral history provided evidence of women playing critical roles at different periods of history; politics, religion or nation-building, military or wars of liberation. In places where dual structures of government are in place, women and men held joint spaces in the administration of their people (Akiyode-Afolabi, 2018). In fact, Africa could add \$316 billion or 10% to GDP in the period to 2025 if each country makes advances in gender equality to match the country in the region that has achieved

the most progress towards parity. Today, however, this “best-in-region” scenario seems a distant possibility. At the current rate of progress, Africa could take more than 140 years to achieve gender parity (ADB/UNECA, 2019).

Taking a look at public administration in Africa, evidence shows that women are underrepresented at all levels of decision making. The gender disparity is most noticeable at the highest levels of decision making. In these top leadership positions, women make up only 21% of public administrators across eight countries with available data. Women fare slightly better at the next highest decision making level of senior managers. Across the 11 countries with available data, women make up 28% of senior management positions in public administration. Women are best represented in Lesotho, accounting for 38% of civil servants at these top two decision making levels. At the lowest level of decision making monitored, women managers within the civil service make up 30% across 13 countries with available data. At the managerial level, women reach parity in Lesotho (53%) and Namibia (54%). Women remain underrepresented among managers in the remaining 11 countries (UNDP, 2022). The table below shows an extract from the available data and reflects women’s participation in public administration in Africa between 2018 and 2020 from selected countries. From the table, Botswana and Seychelles have achieved the stipulated 50% threshold for women in public administration overall with 60% and 54% respectively. Zambia has a long way to go with a mere 25%, having the same parity as Guinea Bissau.

Women’s participation in Public Administration in Africa – 2018 to 2020

Country	Year achieved	Percentage % of women in public administration overall
Angola	2018	42
Botswana	2019	60
Cabo Verde	2019	47
Guinea	2018	26
Guinea Bissau	2019	25
Kenya	2019	46
Mauritius	2019	29
Rwanda	2019	34
Sao Tome & Principe	2020	38
Seychelles	2018	54
South Africa	2019	49
Zambia	2018	25

Source: UNDP, 2022

The Government of the Republic of Zambia’s vision on gender as is contained in the “Vision 2030” is to achieve gender equity and equality in the socio-economic development process by 2030. In this regard, the government adopted the National Gender Policy (NGP) in 2000 which addressed the need to build and strengthen national capacity for advocating and mainstreaming gender in the development process. The policy was aimed at “achieving full participation of both women and men in the development process at all levels in order to ensure sustainable development and attainment of equity and equality between sexes” (Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2014). Zambia is a state party to a number of international and regional instruments that guarantee the rights of women and gender equality and women’s empowerment including the SDGs, CEDAW (1991), the Beijing Declaration on the Platform for Action (1995), the Convention on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), the Equal Remuneration Convention, the Convention on Prohibition of Discrimination in Occupations, Convention on the Elimination of the worst forms of Child

Labor and the convention on Economic and Social and Cultural Rights (ECOSOC). It is also party to regional policy frameworks such as Maputo Protocol (2003), African Charter on Human and People’s Rights and the Rights of Women (1979), Solemn Declaration on Gender and Equality in Africa (2004), SADC Protocol in Gender and Development Protocol (2008), then subscribes to the COMESA Gender Policy. These instruments advocate women’s equal and effective participation in all areas of decision making (Gender Links Zambia, 2020).

According to Samanga (2019), Zambia has made slight progress and over the past decade, the country has witnessed an unprecedented rise in female leaders serving in influential national positions. Among the notable women are Inonge Wina and Mutale Nalumango, the first female Republican Vice Presidents; Nelly Mutti, the first female Parliament Speaker; Justice Ireen Mambilima, the first female Chief Justice; Stella Libongani, the first female Inspector General of the Zambia Police and Professor Hildah Ngambi, the first female vice-chancellor at a public University. While this development is heralded as a big step in promoting female involvement in governance, history shows that their influence in leadership is not limited to the contemporary period. In Zambia, though there seems to be a fair percentage of women MPs and also those women participating in political life, decision making bodies as well, this has not yet translated into a more equal position of women in general within the society nor has it strengthened gender equality in the social-economic life. Representation has remained below the desired 30% and has remained inadequate in other critical areas of public service and decision making roles especially in public administration as seen in the table below.

Gender representation of management positions in the Public Service

Position	No. of Women	% of Women	No. of Men	% of Men	Total No. of Positions
Permanent Secretaries	13	23.2%	43	76.6%	56
Deputy Permanent Secretaries	2	16.6%	10	83.3%	12
Directors	103	29%	241	71%	344
Heads of Department	722	31.1%	1597	68.9%	2319

Source: Policy Monitoring and Research Centre, 2020

Despite the appointment of women to key decision making positions such as Vice-President, Chief Justice, Head of the Anti-Corruption Commission, Auditor General, Head of the Drug Enforcement Commission, and President of the Court of Appeal, Zambia has a mere 12% women in parliament and 8% in local government. Current data indicated that on the political empowerment ranking, Zambia stands at number 119 against other countries in the world. When looking at how far countries have gone to close their gender gaps, Zambia ranks number 85 (WEF, 2023). As noted by Kellerman and Rhodes (2007), it is clear that public administrations around the world have not yet tapped the full talents and potential of women. If public administration is to be representative of society and inclusive of women, viable pathways must exist for women to enter and advance to leadership positions at all levels and in all sectors on an equal basis with men. A growing number of women aspire to leadership on the same terms as men and have made the same choices as their male counterparts, but they continue to confront obstacles. Therefore, achieving gender equality is fundamental to the development and progression of society as a whole. From a developmental perspective, equal participation of women in decision making structures is crucial for creating gender sensitive policies and democratic government.

Obstacles faced by women in decision making

Public institutions have played a critical role in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment through constitutional guarantees and laws on gender equality; national gender policies and action plans;

establishing ministries of women; and setting quotas or reservations for women in parliaments, local government decision making bodies, and public agencies (Council of Europe, 2017). However, gender disparities persist and public policy reforms are still needed to tackle gender inequalities, ensure women's and men's equal access to basic services, labor markets, resources, and assets, and to promote equal voice in decision making. According to Nasser (2017), public administration at both local and central level, generally reflects the orientation and character of domestic politics. In patriarchal and exclusionary societies, women, youth and minorities are often excluded from decision making positions in public administration. For instance, it is common in many countries to observe a higher proportion of women in lower-level positions in public administration. Women tend to be more present in 'support' functions as well as in 'traditional' sectors such as education, health and social care, where they generally earn less than their male colleagues. In short, public administration perpetuates gender biased traditions, attitudes and practices, and this situation often reveals a lack of transparency, effectiveness and inclusion.

- **Patriarchal system**

The Ministry of Gender in its 2019 Report highlights that the Zambian culture is based on patriarchal values across tribes and is highly conservative. Therefore, headship is conferred to men and this perpetuates women's subordination in decision making, ownership and inheritance of assets. The slow pace in attaining gender equality in the country has therefore been negatively affected by the deep rooted culture and mindset to embrace women and girls as equal partners in national development (Ministry of Gender, 2019). In addition, culturally, Zambia has high power distance and low masculinity scores and so individuals are expected not only to respect and not question authority but also to be seen to be supportive of others. Women therefore do not have equal influence over the policy decisions that affect their lives and the overall development of the state. And this has perpetuated the increase in the gender gaps in public administration.

UNDP (2005), highlights that patriarchy is a very strong factor that explains male dominance over females. It is believed that men will sit back in the family to keep the family name and lineage growing while women will be married out. Thus, while men are being trained for leadership activities, women are confined to household responsibilities; roles ascribed to them by culture which affect them later in life, thereby making them lose self-confidence/worth and have low self-esteem in their career in adult life, politics inclusive. Chiroro (2005), contends that "women are often not treated as full-fledged citizens. Having equal rights on paper does not necessarily translate into effective practices on the ground. Subtle discriminatory mechanisms rooted in patriarchal norms and values continue to pervade people's lives". Thus, to do away with patriarchy, men must lead initiatives in changing their behaviors on issues of gender equality, which cascade into the socialization process of the younger generation of men (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2015).

Findings from the interviews of the study indicated that most respondents agreed and indicated that public administration in Zambia perpetuates gender inequality owing to the patriarchal nature of our system. Most respondents highlighted that in most public institutions, men occupy most of the decision making positions and this has affected the decision making outcomes. Women are mostly given care ministries for example, Community Development and Social Services which was found to be a gender biased ministry and when looking at departments in these ministries, women are condensed in for example, care departments such as Human Resources and fewer in finance and also planning departments.

- **Stereotypes views**

Women in decision making face another obstacle in the form of stereotype views of not only men but women alike. Customary law and patriarchal culture often causes the "gendered division" of labor where men are expected to lead and occupy the decision making roles whether in the home, in the community, or in national life, while women play a subordinate role (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2021; Poltera, 2019). Such social norms of power allocation make it more difficult for women to

leave their traditional domestic roles for public life, and they hinder their career progress even more once they join the public sector. Moreover, scholars (Mwale & Dodo, 2017) noted that early socialization practices for girls, rooted in cultural and social traditions in Africa, prepare young women to be good wives and mothers. On the other hand, Emmet (2001), noted that the rituals and rites of passage pertaining to the boy child nurture them for leadership positions.

Results from the study show that men and women alike agreed that the reason why stereotype views continue to exist in public administration is because of the way we socialize our children from childhood where a boy is groomed to lead and a girl to be led. Some respondents noted also that fewer women who manage to rise the decision making ladder face stereotypes views from both society and organizations and are painted bad. As such, the negative stereotype views towards women's participation in decision making and leadership roles are not only limited to those who aspire to become leaders but also to those who are already in the decision making spheres. For example, in Zambia, a woman Member of Parliament once requested for the harmonization of statutory laws (Ebeku, 2005) that banned customary practices like bride price and sexual cleansing, which she recalls led to the marginalization of many women. In response, a male member of parliament said that "gender equality would depend on how women behaved". Another male parliamentarian also shared his view by saying "The so-called discrimination was God-made and would be very difficult to get rid of." This single case tells everything about the impact of cultural and traditional beliefs even on those people who are at the helm of governance especially in public administration (Ebeku, 2005).

• **Structural conditions**

Public administration in Zambia faces structural challenges as well. The findings from this study revealed that organizational practices including unequal career advancement opportunities between men and women, lack of policies to support women, and lack of respect for women in top positions is still there. With regard to career advancement, findings revealed that sometimes, institutions would rather appoint a man despite both men and women having attained the necessary qualifications needed for that position. This makes the women not really see the requirement to upgrade their qualifications as it serves them no purpose. This result is in line with previous studies by Kiaye & Singh (2013), where they reported that the nature of the work environment faced by women is found to be the major determinant of their career advancement. Further, an empirical study in Kenya's civil service sector (Kirai & Mukulu, 2012) highlighted that discriminatory practices in recruitment, selection, and promotion towards women have contributed to the limited number of women moving to managerial positions. Respondents of this study indicated that promotion is based on who knows who and also on the informal networking that one has with higher-level leaders in a given organization. Accordingly, they rated discriminating due to their gender (25%), work-life balance (30%), and lack of support from their bosses (24%). These survey results showed that discriminatory organizational structures and practices are major hindrances to women's career advancement in the public sector.

Another factor that was prominent with the responses was the issue of women refusing to be transferred to posts that detach them from their families. They indicated that men are more willing to work off station than women. Similarly, researchers such as Posholi (2012), argue that since women are torn between work and family demands, their leadership/career advancement is often at a substantial cost of their personal lives. And so, in his survey in Lesotho, Posholi indicated that the majority of women rated conflict with family responsibilities as a barrier to their career advancement. In this way, gender gaps in decision making are exacerbated.

• **Limits to women's collective action**

Achieving gender equality requires women's active participation and involvement in decision making at all

levels, starting in the home and extending to the highest levels of government. The fact that gender inequalities continue to exist in all sectors at all levels, has negative implications on national development (Ministry of Gender and Child Development, 2014). Thus, apart from the legislature and parliamentary representation, women's participation as leaders and decision makers in other areas of the public sector is a key step towards women's empowerment in public life. Women's inclusion in decision making positions across government sectors and positions such as education, finance, health, energy, defense, and foreign affairs, would help women's career progress in particular, as well as gender parity in the public sector in general (UNDP, 2021). Without a gender equality culture in the political and societal space, women won't have opportunities for upward mobility (Inglehart & Norris 2003).

Results from the study indicated that women are fewer in decision making positions because most public institutions in Zambia are politicized and specifically women need to belong to a political party to access decision making positions. Most political parties glaringly have no agenda for gender equality and women are not seen and heard. Their participation is restricted to the women's wing, to play the cheerleaders role in the party – political game to manipulate the political space. At times, men push forward some women who can serve their interests. Therefore, Bauer & Burnet (2013) argued that increasing the participation of women in public life through the quota system has a symbolic representation effect. They argued that even a small number of women in a decision making role would inspire other women to become more engaged in decision making roles. For example, Bauer & Burnet (2013) in their study found that gender quotas in Botswana and Rwanda have had a significant symbolic effect. Participants of this study from both countries identified women in parliaments and ministries inspired them to seek more decision making roles in their working place. In addition, women from Rwanda reported that, due to more women in the cabinets, parliaments, mayoral offices, and chief executives, the respect they were given by their community was equal to that given to men.

WHAT WORKS TO BUILD REPRESENTATION AND CLOSE GENDER GAPS

From the literature and results presented from our study, it can be noted that increasing the number of women in decision making especially in public administration is of great importance. A fundamental argument for increased representation of women in public service is that when the composition of the public sector reflects the composition of the society it serves, government will be more responsive and effective (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2021). Thus, closing gender gaps in public administration is important to ensuring truly inclusive development and democratic governance and helps to restore trust and confidence in public institutions and enhance the sustainability and responsiveness of public policies. From this we learn a few lessons and come up with mechanisms that will help implementers to move towards closing the gender gaps in public administration.

- **Use of media and media campaigns**

The media plays an important role in women's lives and how it puts their issues to the public is of great help. According to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), (2014), the media can exercise the utmost influence on how society perceives men and women and their respective roles within it. In 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action recognized and predicted the media's "potential to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women" (para. 234). This call has been echoed in the proposed targets under Goal 5 of the post-2015 SDGs. Like in 1995, challenges remain in utilizing media to combat discrimination, counter gender stereotypes and raise awareness of women's rights issues. While globally, women are greater users of social media than men (McPherson, 2014), many women, especially in developing countries, still do not have access to this technology due to infrastructure, costs and discriminatory social norms (International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), 2010). Social media has proved to be a powerful vehicle for bringing women's rights issues to the attention of a wider public,

galvanizing action on the streets of cities around the world and encouraging policy makers to step up commitments to gender equality.

In Zambia, the media has been helpful in championing the works of women and this has brought courage to would-be women in decision making. The surge of female bloggers has in particular helped attract a younger generation of activists, who represent a key target audience to break established stereotypes and help advance gender equality. The media also have an important role to play in promoting a culture of gender equality and diversity. To do this for example, strategic campaigns to reducing gender stereotypes should be organized to provide space for women from all groups in media and make visible their contribution and participation in all areas of life. Additionally, positive models should be promoted to ensure more women and girls engage in public life and also women's contribution to politics and policy making should be more visible. This is because the extent to which women are represented in public life and in decision making processes has a gendered impact on policy making (Brody, 2009).

- **Implement laws and policies that advance gender equality**

Governments and organizations across all regions of SSA have introduced certain policies and programs to enhance women's representation in the public sector. National laws and policies on advancing gender equality are in place in most countries, but rarely enforced in the realm of public administration. The UN's 2017 report on gender equality noted that most African governments in general struggle to achieve gender equality due to weak policy implementation and poor institutional capacity, which have negatively affected the possible gains that may have been achieved via the quota system and related forms of policy instruments. African governments should therefore build their capacity to adequately implement, monitor, and evaluate progress made in implementing policies, laws, and programs to advance women's career progress in all sectors (UNESCO, 2017). However, there is a lack of impact evaluation on the effectiveness of these policies.

From the findings of the study, it can be seen that despite enacting progressive policies and legislation and acceding to international instruments that promote women's participation in decision making, the reality is that participation in decision making processes in Zambia is dominantly male dominated. The situation is that women are under-represented in all decision making processes at all levels including Parliament (17%), Local Government (7%) and Civil Service (10%) (Democracy Works Foundation and Zambia National Women's Lobby (DWF/ZNWL), 2021). Therefore, in order for the country to move towards closing gender gaps, it is essential to implement policies on gender equality. The Protocols have been signed but implementation remains on mere paper. The Government and stakeholders, especially Civil Society Organizations, have been implementing a lot of interventions that have contributed to achieving SDG5 as evidenced by the country recording a positive trend in the gender inequality index which has continued to fall from 0.627 in 2011 to 0.587 in 2015 and 0.540 for 2018 (UNDP, 2018).

- **Strengthen training for women in civic rights and leadership skills**

Formal and informal training are important and have a great impact on professional performance everywhere in the world. In public administration, training especially for women is important as it brings with it benefits not only to individual women but the institution as well. UNDP (2014) suggests that, as training and other forms of capacity building have strategic importance to increase women's presence as senior leaders of organizations, governments need to restructure recruitment and development programs to ensure that all women have equal access to managerial, entrepreneurial, technical, and leadership training. In support of this view, a study in Lesotho's public sector (Posholi, 2012), illustrated that the majority of women interviewed were enthusiastic to study further and advance their careers. Further, that it is important that women receive

training before entering politics, while they are running as candidates and during their time in office.

Training of women in public administration is important also in that at the micro-level, organizations have an invaluable role in promoting women to leadership roles. The findings of this study indicated that organizations' role is multifaceted, from improving the recruitment process, to making evaluation and promotion free of gender bias, to ensuring women have access to the same training and development opportunities as men. Organizations with concrete policies and guidelines that facilitate the career advancement of women have shown improvements in balancing gender in the leadership arena (OECD, 2014). For example, UNDP initiates and supports women public servants in Eritrea and South Sudan to enhance their capacities in leadership through providing leadership capacity and professional development training (Finkel, et al., 2021). Therefore, what works to increase representation of women and close gender gaps in public administration is training for women public servants and managers.

- **To standardize the definitions of employment in public administration**

Zambian public administration institutional arrangement structure from the national, provincial, district and sub-district levels comprising different heads of people. The public sphere consists of politics, administration, and the public; thus, there should be a clear distinction of positions of authority, influence, and decision making at these various levels. There is need to establish standardized definitions of employment in public administration and any related decision making positions not occupied through elections. A common definition of public administration should be employed to establish statistical categories that should then be monitored. Studies show that if employment became a more even playing field, it can create a positive domino effect on other areas prone to gender inequality. This case does not spare Zambia. Borat, et al., (2017), recorded that Zambia's employment equalities are at 67% men dominating women with good wages as compared to the opposite sex. When it comes to job segregation, one of the causes of gender inequality within employment is the division of jobs.

Traditionally, public services employ public servants through a specific legal status that emphasizes stability and lifelong employment. This generally entails high levels of job security, stable but limited (seniority-based) pay and benefits, and a decent pension at the end, based on years of employment. This may work well for occupations that are specific to the public sector, that do not benefit from a high level of movement in and out. However, the future of work brings a need for a wider variety of skills and backgrounds than ever before. With this greater diversity of skills comes the need for a greater diversity of employment models. Traditional civil service employment may not be so attractive for all profiles in the labor market – for example, some in-demand tech professionals may be less interested in being a lifelong civil servant. They may be more interested in taking shorter-term contracts (with higher pay options) that enable them to work on interesting projects with high visibility and impact (OECD, 2020). Thus, a forward-looking public service requires coherent and robust workforce planning. In a fast-changing employment environment, with scarce skills and resources on one side and unpredictable future changes on the other, strategic workforce planning based on foresight capacities has the potential to become a cornerstone of public employment policies (OECD, 2019).

- **Strengthen the collection and publication of data**

According to Domingo et al (2015), the literature on women in leadership in the civil service is sparse and the little data available indicates that there are challenges that women face in decision making. As a result, there is need to strengthen the collection and publication of data on gender equality in public administration especially in Zambia. In 2013, UNDP launched the global Gender Equality in Public Administration (GEPA) initiative with the objectives of: (1) supporting women's empowerment and expanding their participation and leadership in the executive branches of the state; and (2) contributing to up-to-date

evidence of gender equality in public administration to facilitate informed policy and decision making (UNDP, 2014). However, gender equality has not always been a guiding principle of public administration reforms.

In this vein, UNDP should work with countries to increase the availability of sex-disaggregated data on public administration and prevent barriers in accessing this data. In addition, any future data obtained through the global tracking mechanism should be included in national statistical reports on women and men and widely disseminated. Using standardized statistical definitions, central institutions and national statistical offices must promote the collection of sex-disaggregated data on employment in public administration. This data can be used to inform targets for gender equality in public administration by highlighting any existing gender gaps in decision making positions and specific occupational categories and sectors. Also, it is necessary to establish strategic partnerships to advocate for and assist in collecting data. Establishing partnerships with relevant organizations will ensure the longevity of programs that support gender equality in public administration and encourage the widespread use of the global monitoring mechanism. There are several organizations with the potential to work with UNDP in collecting and disseminating data related to gender equality in public administration, including UN Women, EUROSTAT, ILO, UN Statistics Division, and the European Institute for Gender Equality (OECD, 2014).

- **Solidarity and feminist organizing**

As highlighted above, women's organizations or organizations that fight for women and issues that concern them, are important in closing gender gaps in Zambia. In many countries, Zambia included, women's organizations strongly support the participation of women in political and decision making at local, regional and national levels. Women's movements and organizations are crucial in the struggle for equal participation and representation as they are key to motivating and engaging women in public life and in politics, mobilizing their collective power to demand accountability and change, and for these reasons, their experience and expertise could be used to support women. Women's organizations can also campaign for flexible working arrangements, childcare, and ending violence against women, which can transform workplace culture and women's chances of reaching the top (Hinds, 2015). In Namibia, for example, women's organizations were credited with helping to increase women in national legislatures through advocacy, sensitization, and by working to change electoral systems (Bauer, 2004).

Civil society's role in empowering the people is well recognized. Civil society organizations in many democracies perform the function of representing the interests and asserting the rights and power of the people. They can come in and help interest groups and people to fight more effectively for their interests, thereby empowering them (Diamond, 1999). Governance cannot exist apart from social development. Many factors affect the formation of institutional and legal principles of public administration transforming it and endowing new characteristics (Mukhametshin et al., 2019). And among other things, it requires effective forms of civil society institutions' participation in public administration to be integrated (Baibarin, et al., 2016). Therefore, governments should prioritize funds to organizations that work for women and partnerships between government and civil society can contribute to advancing participation. This will in turn help in strengthening and investing in non-governmental organizations and women's movements would also pressure both governments and society to act on the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions in the public sector.

- **Working with men and identifying male allies**

In order to achieve gender equality in public administration, the perspectives of both men and women must be included. Working with political institutions and their predominantly male leaders and interventions that integrate both genders' perspectives can provide opportunities to promote change from within and gradually alter traditional attitudes about the role of women and men in public and political life. According to Brown

& Ostrove (2013), men acting as allies for women may be a powerful means of reducing the effects of underrepresentation. Rather than simply being motivated to self-regulate prejudice toward marginalized others, allies engage in behavior that supports social justice, as such men may be more effective allies than women. The 2021 report, *Male allies at work: gender-equality supportive men reduce negative underrepresentation effects among women*, showed that having an ally increased the sense of belonging and trust felt among women that they would be treated fairly. Women perceived any ally as empowering, and male allies as setting norms of equality in organizations (Moser & Branscombe, 2022).

Lessons learned from various studies and also field responses indicate that men visibly supporting women at work is even more important in geographies with entrenched gender roles. In certain cultures, male allies can make the difference between slow progress and no progress at all. As such men need to be more actively engaged and involved in the debate and gender transformation process of achieving long-term sustainable gender equality measures and outcomes. Changing the behavior of men can play an important role in changing gender relations and inequalities within society (Mannell, 2014). Also, men allies can support progress towards gender parity in senior leadership in a number of impactful ways. They can proactively exert influence to change behaviors in their own circles as well as shoulder some of the responsibility of facing down sexist behavior in the workplace. By supporting and encouraging female colleagues in ways that work for those colleagues, they can facilitate women's career progression. And by creating an environment in which women feel as included and heard as their male counterparts, they will help them to achieve their potential, and encourage them not to take their talents elsewhere. Moreover, strengthening partnerships with men as agents of change and dismantling gender stereotypes could influence change in how both genders perceive the participation of women.

CONCLUSION

Public administration has become an essential and dominant part of society as it plays an important role in people's lives. A critical mass of women in public administration, in particular in senior decision making positions, is important for equity reasons and because it brings more women's perspectives to policy and other discussions. Decision making positions in public administration may also be among the few available or 'acceptable' employment opportunities for women, making it all the more important that women have a fair chance of competing for them. The minimal participation of women, especially in policy making and leading important organizations and institutions, is still a concern in the context of debates and dialogues about gender equality and equity in Africa.

Findings from the study revealed that women continue to suffer discrimination and are lowly represented in top decision making positions. Women find themselves overrepresented in some policy areas that are considered to have less influence and power but underrepresented in some other areas often considered more prestigious. For example, women most often lead social affairs, education, and women's affairs ministries, while they are much less likely to lead areas such as defense, finance, and foreign affairs ministries. Many factors were found to be causes for women's low participation in decision making in Zambia. For example, it was found that even when women succeed in gaining education and enter the decision making mainstream, they are often marginalized by institutional settings that reflect men's needs and ignores women's different needs and experience. Thus, women often find themselves isolated and marginalized in unfriendly, if not hostile, male-dominated institutional cultures; where one respondent rightly alluded that in public administration, women must continually prove themselves to be capable, but the men are assumed to be competent even when they are demonstrably not. Women must provide strong arguments to support their views; whereas men are simply believed on the basis of their professional qualifications and personal relationships.

In this vein, this research concludes that it is important to have more women in decision making positions in

public administration by creating a gender balance in public administration for example by integrating women into political parties; each person recognizing that shared work and parental responsibilities promote women's increased participation in public life; change the way we socialize our children; and also establish equal access for women to training in decision making. To reduce gender gaps, it is important to understand that women's level of participation cannot be judged solely on the number or proportion of women within a particular institution. An individual can have a level of participation ranging from as low as being recorded as a member of the institution but having no input into decision making, or even awareness of the decisions being made (nominal participation); to as high as having considerable voice and influence, and holding a key decision making position (interactive/empowering participation). Therefore, mechanisms such as use of media, training of women in decision making, as well as implementing the various international instruments that fight for women will help reduce the gender gap that exist in public administration.

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