



Women Participation in Leadership Positions in South Africa from Mtubatuba Local Municipality perspective

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ABSTRACT

Introduction/Main Objectives: The article aimed to explore the nature, level and extent of women participation in administrative and political leadership in the Mtubatuba Local Municipality (MLM). It adopted the socialist feminism theory as its framework. **Research Methods:** Qualitative research methods was used in which data were collected using semi-structured interviews from eight women working in the Mtubatuba Local Municipality's political and administrative structures selected using purposive sampling methods. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze data received from participants. **Novelty:** The researchers found that women's leadership in both the administrative and political realms of the MLM was a struggle that demanded endurance against various harsh forces mainly stemming from culture and patriarchy. **Finding/Results:** The article concluded that the excessive prevalence of gender inequality and male dominance in leadership was worsened by the fact that the few women in management and leadership were not seriously considered in decision-making. This was regardless of the existence of many national and local level policies and strategies aimed at elevating women into leadership with the agenda of attaining gender equality. **Conclusion:** Political organizations in the Municipality failed to mobilize support for the policies that promote of advancement of women.

1. Introduction

The fall of apartheid and the rise of constitutional democracy in South Africa brought with hopes that elements of inequality, including race, ethnicity, social class and gender would fall resulting in the creation of a country that respected equality among its citizens (Thobejane, 2015). Almost 30 years after this fall, some elements of inequality still linger in South African society, among these gender inequalities particularly in leadership positions. While various policies and laws have been implemented to meet the Bill of Rights demands for equality by gender in leadership roles, disturbing realities in which women are still subservient to men and have very restricted access to leadership opportunities still exist. This paper explored women managers' participation in the political and administrative leadership positions of the Mtubatuba Local Municipality (MLM), a predominantly rural local government located in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province. The study's focus areas were the levels and nature of women's inclusion in politics and governance, the power dynamics affecting women's leadership and the broad challenges women encounter in securing senior positions within MLM.

The problem at hand is the need to explore and understand how only 13.04% (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2021) of elected officials are women and how only less than 30% of administrative leaders in the council are women. Such a problem is a severe threat to social justice and a violation of women's rights. A research gap exists on the community-level dynamics that have created such an unbalanced status quo in MLM while other local municipalities,

especially urban ones have larger women representations. The knowledge gap is further broadened by the fact that such inequalities occur in the presence of a myriad of policies that have already accepted that patriarchy is among the core causes of women's underrepresentation in government and politics.

2. Literature Review

In this study, we are examining the gap in the involvement of women in leadership positions and participation in government and politics in South Africa. This section also presents the theoretical framework that is underpinned by the study.

2.1 Women leadership in politics and public service: South Africa

In South Africa, women make up 50.74% of the total population (World Bank, 2020). However, this representation of women in the general population does not translate to their proportionate representation in politics or senior positions in local government. In fact, this is also a widespread problem all over the world, women mostly find it difficult to attain managerial role in their organizations (Baykal, Soyalt and Yeşil, 2020). Mokoena (2018) provides an overview of the representation of women in the public service in South Africa. The author reveals that in senior positions in the public service, the province where the highest number of women representations in Gauteng where 43.7% of all the senior managers in public service are women. The province with the least women representation of senior-level managers in the public service is the Free State where only 31.1% of the senior managers are women. At the national level,

Mokoena (2018) notes that women senior managers constitute 40.9% of all public sector senior managers. Notably, in KwaZulu-Natal (which ranks third for women representation nationally) at least 40.4% of all senior managers in the public service are women (Mokena 2018).

With regards to women in political leadership roles, Vetten (2016) states that before the arrival of democracy in the Republic of South Africa in the year 1994, only 2.8 % of women were in Parliament. The first democratic elections in South Africa saw this percentage growing to 27.7% (Vetten, 2016). By the year 2016, there were 41% women in the cabinet while women deputy ministers made up 47% of all deputy ministers (South African Government, 2016). Also, there were 41% women in the National Assembly (South Africa Brand, 2016). South Africa now ranks 10th globally in terms of women's representation in politics (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019). It ranked 11th in 2014 and 7th in 2011 (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2019). The country's ranking has therefore deteriorated over the years. Do not indent the first paragraph of every section or subsection. The Introduction is not an extended version of the abstract; Never use the same sentences in both sections. Please use no more than three levels of headings.

2.2 *The socio-political contextual background: MLM*

MLM is a category B local municipality that falls under the Umkhanyakude District Municipality (Mtubatuba Local Municipality 2021). MLM is regarded as the most rural municipality of Kwa-Zulu-Natal (Ezeuduyi & Dlomo 2020). The Municipality has a population of 202 176 (MLM, 2021). The MLM (2021) further reveals that 98% of the

population is made up of Black Africans. The dominant language spoken in MLM is IsiZulu, which is spoken by 92% of the population (MLM, 2021). Most of the population are women who make up 54% of the population whilst at the national level, 50.7% of the population are women. The Mtubatuba Local Municipality (2021) also reveals that the majority (70%) of its people are in formal employment whilst 30% are informally employed.

In the 2021 local government elections, the Inkatha Freedom Party, (IFP) won 9 of the council seats, the African National Congress (ANC) 6, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) 4, the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP), the African Independent Congress (AIC) 1, the Democratic Alliance (DA) the National Forum Party (NFP), United Democratic Movement (UDM) and an independent winning a set each (Municipalities of South Africa, 2021). Of the 23 ward councillors, 86.96% are men and the remaining 13.04% are women (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2021). Sadly, this low representation of women at the ward level is a trend in the KwaZulu-Natal Province with the Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma Municipality, named after a woman political icon having no single woman as ward councillor (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2021). The City of Johannesburg, the largest municipality in the country, had 65.93% male ward councillors and 34.07% women ward councillors whilst eThekweni had 79.28% male and 20.72% women ward councillors (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2021). Thus, the Mtubatuba Municipality had a very low representation of women's ward councillors (MLM, 2021) compared to more urban and larger municipalities. At the same time, the

largest municipalities in South Africa and the KwaZulu-Natal Province respectively also did not exhibit a 50:50 distribution of ward councillors by gender (Electoral Commission of South Africa, 2021).

This low representation occurs in a background where political parties that contested the 2021 local government elections presented manifestos that mentioned gender equality as part of their agenda. At the launch of its local government manifesto, the IFP, which holds most council seats in MLM reiterated that it was the “party that stands up for women” further stating that “In fact, the majority of IFP members are women because the IFP provides a genuine platform for empowerment” (IFP, 2021:1). The ANC manifesto stated: “We must do more to achieve parity in gender representation, and appreciation of the role women play in society and communities” (ANC, 2021:26) while the EFF stated that “The EFF municipalities will strive to realise...real women empowerment in society, within the family and at the workplace” (EFF, 2021:44-45). Thus, the irony of the above inequalities in political leadership is occurring in an environment where the main political parties in MLM have committed to the importance of gender equality in political representation and other spheres of life.

Political level gender inequalities replicate themselves in the Municipality’s executive and administrative structures. Very few women hold leadership offices in these structures in MLM (Municipalities of South Africa, 2021). Considering the prevalence of cadre deployment in South Africa, this is not surprising as male-dominated political structures have a major

say on who leads local government administrations (Chamisa & Shava, 2018).

2.3 *The concept of leadership*

Leadership is the process of exerting influence and attaining control over an individual or group (Howard & Ulferts, 2017). Leadership can be classified by domain into administrative and political leadership. Administrative leadership relates to exerting control and influence over public sector operations focusing on how the tactical operations of government are run (Gumede, 2015). In government, administrative leaders are generally employed in positions albeit appointments are not uncommon (Chamisa & Shava, 2018). Political leaders on the other hand are not considered government employees. They influence the development of laws and policies upon which governments work (Chamisa & Shava, 2018). In modern public administration paradigms, there is an emphasis on maintaining a clear separation between administrative and political leadership within jurisdictions, including in local government (Basheka, 2019). In a local government setting like the MLM, the most influential political leaders would be the mayors and ward councillors who are elected to office. Key administrative leaders would include the municipal manager and their team of tactical and executive managers in human resources, finance, information and communication technology units, among others (Vilakazi & Adetiba, 2020). Both administrative and political leaders strongly determine how a government works with the conflict between them being described as a common characteristic (Vilakazi & Adetiba, 2020).

2.3.1 *The concepts of gender inequality and equality in leadership*

Fennell and Arnot (2011) assert that gender equality is a “state of affirming women’s differences from men and with an emphasis in differences from men and with an emphasis on the significance of recognizing the distinct approaches or nature in talking, conceptualizing and interacting social constructs.” These scholars propound the view that gender equality is rooted in the basis that women and men are unique but their recognition of being separate should be equally considered. Thus, gender equality means equal, fair and just treatment between women and men in the workplace (Kuhn & Lauw, 2014). The fundamental attribute for gender equality in the public sector is seen through affording women similar opportunities as men in leadership, without any form of gender stereotyping or discrimination (UNECE, 2007). Gender equality is seen by different scholars as a point of departure for ensuring that there is redress and empowerment for women.

Haatja, Leinoner and Mustakallio (2011) establish that “gender equality means equal obligations, rights and possibilities for men and women in leadership positions.” Kuhn and Lauw (2014:101) acknowledge that gender equality does not mean women and men are biologically the same but the need to ensure that there is no discrimination against women based on their gender. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) states that gender equality is the ability to access rights fully, without prejudice based on sexual orientation that women and men have equal freedom and privilege based on the constitutional rights (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

Public administration legislation and literature concur that gender equality in the public sector is concerned with ensuring respect, dignity and equal access to developmental opportunities by both women and men allowing them chances to reach their full potential (Kahn & Lauw, 2014). For instance, Section 107 and 111 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) states that good human resources and equal development opportunities for human potential should take place in a transformed human resource culture reflecting affirmative action principles. With equality and inequality perspectives comes power dynamics concerns.

2.3.2 *Power dynamics and gender as a concept*

Power dynamics refers to the relationships and interactions between two or more entities that are attempting to exert their influence or control over actions and resources (Bates, Parker & Ogden, 2018). Power dynamics also relate to the types and forms of power in a setting including formal and informal power (Bates, Parker & Ogden, 2018). While formal power is that which one earns by virtue of holding an entitling role or position, informal power is acquired via elements like “unearned privilege, or because they have strong relationships with decision-makers and peers” (Bates, Parker & Ogden, 2018:1). According to Guo (2014), the concept of power dynamics comes with another concept of power distance. This relates to the degree that which parties wielding the least powers accept that power is distributed (Guo, 2014). Thus, if the least powerful groups in power relations believe that there is too much of an unfair

concentration of power in some classes, a large power distance is hinted at. Such power distances can hinder the participation of low-powered groups in development as a result, among other things, resentment of unfair power balances (Guo, 2014).

The above conceptualisations of power dynamics challenge interest in understanding the nature of gendered power dynamics - including their formality or informality and the power distances involved. Gendered power dynamics relate to the power-related interactions between persons and or groups of different genders (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Gender power dynamics also relate to whether one or more of the genders would consider giving or relinquishing some power to another (United Nations, 2018). The UN (2018:1) opines that in current gendered power dynamics, "Power is normally never given, power normally needs to be taken". This view is followed by comments that all concerned stakeholders need to work towards the transfer of power from male-dominated echelons to underpowered women.

2.3.3 The role of patriarchy in gendered power dynamics

Patriarchy, as a function of cultural practice that views women as inferior to men, is viewed as the most dominant factor in suppressing women's leadership in both politics and administration (Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb, 2013). Patriarchy has affected women's historical development resulting in more women being underqualified for current leadership positions than men. While trends have shown significant increases in the proportions of educated women, gender stereotypes, again associated with

patriarchal thinking still pervade societies to the disadvantage of women (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). Patriarchy has also created negative belief systems among women themselves. Centuries of oppression have cowed women from taking leadership positions believing that they would not make good leaders (Gipson et al. 2017). All these factors have interacted to create an environment where women's leadership is a questioned phenomenon and where male leadership is viewed as an unquestioned norm. This has doubtlessly affected women's participation in government.

2.3.4 Women's participation in administration in local governments

Despite the protocols and conventions that have been regionally and globally ratified, women's participation in local government administrative leadership is considered dire. Studies have attributed the inadequate appointment of women as leaders in municipalities to several factors with the dominant of these being discrimination, gender biases and stereotyping (Gipson et al., 2017; Ruzunduge, Zhou, and Shingirayayi, 2020). Alkadry and Tower (2014) report that women are side-lined from getting management roles right from recruitment to selection in the administrative processes of an organisation, such that most do not get employed to start with. Supporting this claim, Sheet-Cushman (2017) observe that in some government organisations, women only get such positions as network worker, secretary, clerical officer, and front desk officers and not managerial positions.

In South Africa, the male-superior paradigm is apparent, due to various philosophies that are associated with the

masculine stereotype (Gipson et al., 2017). Ryan et al. (2011) opine that women are used as mercenaries to attract people to invest in some organisations. Gipson et al. (2017) add that when women get employed in senior positions, it is more with the expectation that they will display their incompetence, and in the process fail. It can, thus, be deduced that women are not given priority when it comes to leadership positions but are used as back-ups to support the capabilities of their male colleagues.

Wallace (2015) notes that women's representation in leadership positions is very important in various ways, which include the need for social justice, promotion of equality, equity and parity, and enhancing the quality of governance. Madsen, Longman and Daniel (2012) note that, for more women to be involved in various leadership opportunities, there is a need for them to develop relevant skills and competencies, mentoring opportunities, and the need for effective coaching that is related to leadership and governance. The presence of women in leadership positions will contribute to positive unique experiences where women can mentor younger girls and women as role models for improved governance (Nidiffer, 2010). Morely (2014) argues that women in leadership positions within the administration and governance domains of the public services sector are instruments for economic growth and sustainable development. Deductively, women's leadership in rural communities could also drive the developmental and gender parity effect in these parts.

2.3.5 *Women's leadership participation in rural communities*

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance's

(IIDEA) 2021" Women's Political Participation ~ Africa Barometer 2021" highlighted several key challenges that either impeded or complicated rural women's participation in political leadership. These were strong patriarchal and traditional structures that did not support women's ascension, illiteracy and low educational levels, lack of political information, lack of political support, challenges in accessing political centres and funding constraints (IIDEA, 2021). While some urban women were also affected by similar challenges, the extent and intensity of challenges faced by rural women required enhanced government and multi-stakeholder involvement. The Women's Charter for Accelerated Development recognises some of these challenges and acknowledges rural women in general as a vulnerable group (Parliament of South Africa, 2021). The charter, to reverse male dominance and women's underrepresentation in rural community affairs, proposes that "Rural women shall be part of decision-making structures in traditional communities." (Parliament of South Africa, 2021:44). In addition to training and education, the inclusion of women in traditional structures could help to gradually dismantle rigid cultural practices that venerate men while disregarding women.

Fontana (2015) points out the need to enhance rural women's leadership quality through meaningful participation in all forms of decision-making processes in their communities. Thus, rural women should be part of decision-making from parliament to local government levels. Fontana (2015) maintains that governments at all levels should establish necessary institutional frameworks that will accommodate the poor and women in decision-making in their

communities. To encourage more women in the leadership activities in the rural areas, the UNEPA (2018) maintains that the government at the local level should employ participatory approaches to eliminate socio-cultural constraints that may affect women's participation in decision-making. Haggblade, Hazell and Reardon (2018) assert that there is a need for capacity building and the use of quota systems that will strengthen rural women's leadership skills for effective participation in governance.

2.4 Theoretical framework

Feminism theory (Gilligan 1997; Calàs and Smircich, 1996) focuses on analysing gender inequalities in human society. The theory explains the art of discrimination, objectification, oppression and patriarchal issues that women are facing in society. Feminist theory emerged from feminist movements traceable to the nineteenth century (Hartiningtyas & Sumayah, 2021). It is manifested in a variety of disciplines and most of these knowledge areas or disciplines have employed the feminist theory to explain how the gender system work, as well as to examine normative and ethical issues, to assess how, and if societies are treating women in fair manners (Hartiningtyas & Sumayah, 2021).

There are many variations of the feminist theory (Kark, 2014; Wallce, 2015). These include the liberal, radical and socialist theories of feminism (Napikoski, 2021). This paper applied the socialist feminist theory whose origins are in the precepts of Marxist and socialist movements advocating for classless societies (Armstrong, 2020). The basic views of the socialist feminist theory are that:

- Women in lower social classes including those in rural settings face the most severe forms of oppression but are poorly represented by liberal feminism with its focus on working middle and upper-income women (Oakton, n.d; Napikoski, 2021).
- Gender inequality is one of the many forms of oppression suffocating women's progression. Class and racial divides (that also include the urban-rural divide) are also forms of oppression that must be concurrently addressed with gender inequality (Enyew & Mihrete, 2018; Armstrong, 2020).
- Capitalist class structures are gendered and consider men as naturally superior leading to the broad exclusion of women's concerns and needs (Armstrong, 2021).
- Culture is gendered and is designed to oppress women (Napikoski, 2021).
- The labour movements and other bodies advocating for women's rights have generally failed to address inequality within the workplace as a centre of the capitalist state (Thobejane, 2015; Armstrong, 2020; Napikoski, 2021).

The social feminist theory borders on the social advancement of women; for instance, human rights, and social justice, and adds to the critical awareness of individuals in social and political contexts (Oakton, n.d). Social feminism sees all social systems as being built on the oppression of women and calls for fundamental changes in all systems such as education, legal, and social welfare. Its view that gender oppression is part of a wider oppressive system that includes economic, cultural and political inequality is its point of departure from liberal and radical feminist approaches (Napikoski, 2021). According to Napikoski (2021:1), "The goal of socialist feminism is to

work with men to achieve a level playing field for both genders". Thus, gender equality is its core interest.

3. Method, Data, and Analysis

This paper is qualitative in nature hence Interpretive approach was used (Gray, 2017). Within this qualitative frame, phenomenology was used in an attempt to understand gendered power dynamics as a local government phenomenon experienced by women leaders. Given the exploratory nature of this paper and its use of phenomenology, it was described as cross-sectional exploratory phenomenological research. Moreover, following social feminist perspective and the recommendations of previous studies (e.g., Haggblade, Hazell and Reardon, 2018), we draw from the interpretive epistemological tradition. The interpretivist approach arises from a life-world ontology which holds that all observations are value- and theory-laden and that the investigation of the social world cannot uncover objective truth (Williams, 2020). This approach allows the researchers to explore, understand, and analyze how the patriarchal sociocultural norms, gender inequalities affected women's participation in politics particularly in local government level. The strength of this study lies in its ability to provide insights, rich descriptions, and a detailed understanding of the situational nuances influencing the interviewees' experiences with women in political and administrative leadership positions.

The target population was women who work within the political and public administration dimensions of the MLM. These women worked in any of the following roles:

- Women ward councillors

- Women administrative officers in leadership positions
- Women political activists

Purposive sampling was used to select participants, the researcher valued the research participant's interest, willingness and convenience to participate as key factors that determined one's inclusion in the sample. This was on top of meeting the eligibility criteria above. The total sample size was eight participants from an estimated population of 30 women. One participant was purposefully selected from the political and administrative entities listed below:

Table 1. Sample Size

Political party participants	Administrative dimension participants
IFP	Planning Department
DA	Corporate Department
ANC	Community Services
NFP	Technical

Notes: Sample Size used

4. Result and Discussion

The participants were selected from among women involved in political and administrative functions in MLM. Unique codes or pseudonyms were developed and assigned to each participant. Pseudonyms ensured the participants' confidentiality. The selected participants were as follows:

- Two public relations (PR) Councillors: PRCA and PRCB
- Two Line Managers: LMA and LMB
- Two ward councillors: WCA and WCB
- Two officers: OA and OB

In terms of age, two women were aged between 21 to 34, four between 35 to 48, one between 49 to 64 and one above 65.

Theme 1: The levels and nature of women's inclusion in political and governance leadership in the Municipality

4.1 Theme 1: explored the extent to which women were engaged in administrative and political leadership in the Municipality.

Theme 1 yielded three subthemes. These are firstly summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 2. Subthemes under Theme 1

Subthemes - Theme 1	Political domain contributors	Administrative domain contributors
Male dominance and low women engagement in municipal political and administrative structures	WCA	LMA, LMB, OA
Patriarchal and male-dominated nature of political parties; the past versus the present	PRCB, WCB	OA

Notes: Sub-theme of Theme 1

4.1.1 Male dominance and low women engagement in municipal political and administrative structures

Male dominance in municipal structures was a widely discussed concern with all research participants contributing various views towards this phenomenon. The Municipality management team comprises 15 members (MLM, 2021). There are only four women in the unit; this is not in line with government policies of gender equity. The gender ratio in the management team was 4:11, meaning only 27% of the senior management team were women. The participants' responses indicate a lack of compliance with the 50:50 rule in the Municipality. LMA talked about how the 50:50 principles might not be implemented toward the equal inclusion of women in senior positions in the Municipality:

“Even though they are trying for the 50:50 principle in senior positions, women are still not appointed in the top-level management and are less likely to be appointed”. [LMA]

All participants expressed a strong sense of belief that local government, not only in MLM but in South Africa had remained patriarchal in nature despite expected changes towards gender inclusivity. Males set the pace and rules behind women's involvement. Patriarchy as a negative nature was strongly ingrained in political and administrative systems to an extent that taking a leadership position was a major challenge. This in addition to excluding them from power, discouraged them from actively participating in leadership:

“The concept of women as leaders in the Black South African public sector has been viewed as a tertiary factor, male-dominated leadership positions in the government,”. [OA]

As noted, employment in senior leadership was gendered and had still not moved away from past patriarchal natures. Such patriarchal natures are also presented as a subtheme below.

4.1.2 Patriarchal and male-dominated nature of political parties

Women’s political leadership in political parties that eventually contributed to municipal councils determined their chances of leading municipalities. Thus, as long as they did not have exposure to political leadership at the political part level, their chances of transforming into local government leadership were equally constrained. This was the case under the current political party structures as highlighted below:

“I think political power is the control of the appointment of political leaders in the municipalities, women are poorly represented and have little say on such practices”. [PRCB]

Such political limitations as WCB saw it, deny the MLM opportunities to get adequate service delivery. This stems from the participants’ belief that women leaders had more to offer in terms of service to communities:

“Political Parties, structures do not believe in women leadership and women participation in a leadership position such as chairperson of portfolios, speaker or chief whips are male reserved positions, I believe this creates more

limitation for women to have an impact on the service delivery system”. [WCB]

The above view closely relates to an argument by Opstrips and Villdelse (2015) that the lack of gender diversity in political leadership and top management hinders effective productivity. Patriarchy in political and governance systems was noted as a force too strong and a force that was not easy to dismantle even with the passage of time. The participants identified the powerful influence of patriarchal cultures and gender biases:

“My senior male manager once said to me, this Municipality can never be led by women, our fore politicians will turn in their graves- Ngeke siphathwe umfazi,”. [OA]

This Zulu phrase presents an immense gender discrimination slogan against women in a typical rural patriarchal Zulu society, whether in a political or administrative atmosphere. This highlights the intricate relationships between modern leadership systems and past, but pervasive cultural systems – all this eventually suppressing women's leadership. How women leadership survived in such a state inspired a theme on gendered power dynamics in MLM.

4.2 Theme 2 - The power dynamics affecting gender equality in leadership in the Mtubatuba Local Municipality

This theme looked at power dynamics in political structures before looking at the same in the governance and administrative structures of the MLM. It has two subthemes listed below.

Table 3. Subthemes under Theme 2

Subthemes - Theme 2	Political domain contributors	Administrative domain contributors	
Power dynamics and women in ward and portfolio committees	PRCA, PRCB, WCAQ	OA, LMA LMA, LMB	OB noted that unbalanced power dynamics resulted in males playing the role of nominating women into political and municipal committees. This even applied in posts that involved women’s affairs: <i>“I was elected as a party representative to ensure that I represent women issues on the council. The nomination is still being influenced by males as the political party structures”</i> . [OB]
Power dynamics and women in administrative and management roles	PRCA, PRCB, WCAQ		Participants confirmed that women in political structures receive inadequate support via the nomination and voting processes that determine who gets into power: <i>“Women lack support within political structures, they often do not stand a chance to survive competition with men in leadership positions”</i> . [WCA]

Notes: Sub-theme of Theme 2

4.2.1 Power dynamics and women in ward and portfolio committees

Several factors influence eligible women's representation in political leadership at the ward level as party leaders, PR councillors, and ward committees. Due to fewer women being elected to these committees, by default, it limits their strategic participation in decision-making processes at the ward level. Participants, however, indicated that women typically hold powerful positions, such as treasurer or chair of committees, as part of decision-making in the Municipality. The doubt is on the influence women have on decision-making. This is captured in PRCA’s extract:

“I was elected as an additional member to participate in the ward committees, and my role is not enough to influence the committee where it is the men who mostly take decisions”. [PRCA]

Thus, men used their numbers to nominate and appoint other men. With men being dominant in political structures, women found themselves at the mercy of men when it comes to being voted into committees. At the grassroots level, women are excluded from participating as chairpersons. Participants expressed that in public participation structures, such as ward committees and portfolio committees for decision-making, women still have a limited say on the matters of governance. As stated in LMA’s case below, administrative leadership jobs are determined by political entities like portfolio committees that are not gender-balanced:

“I applied to be a Line manager but the decision in portfolio committees is still favouring the male

counterparts, women do not have influence in the committees as compared to men". [LMA]

In their experience, LMA, therefore, records having suffered employment prejudice as a woman because of gender and because of male dominance in committees.

4.2.2 Power dynamics and women in administrative and management

While the previous subtheme focused on women's leadership from mostly a political power dynamics perspective, this theme looked at women in administrative leadership in the MLM taking cognisance of the thin separation between the two. In local government, women's representation and participation in the Municipal Public Accounts Committee (MPAC), EXCO and Local Labour Forums (LLF) and other strategic and administrative fora is also curtailed. The findings indicated that even though women are appointed to some administrative leadership positions, their influence is limited in governance and representation. This trend is also reported in political appointments in the Municipality as well.

"Women always deputise, you hardly see them appointed to be Mayors or Speakers, it is a general trend in all the rural municipalities." [LMA]
"Women are not supported to be in leadership positions, especially to represent women in terms of employment equity in senior management positions". [LMB]

The supposedly responsible authorities including CoGTA, and SALGA were also blamed for not supporting women

managerial and administrative leadership in municipalities:

"I think there is not enough effort in practice to push for women leadership in the local government through Cogta and SALGA as to ensure that local government, women managers are encouraged and, in most instances, compelled to go for training and attend courses at academic institutions". [PRCA]

PRCB also pointed to the limited involvement of women organisations in activities that could support women's political and administrative leadership specifically the IDP development processes. Like with political leadership, this stifled women's chances of getting important experiential learning that could enhance their leadership capacities.

4.3 Theme 3: Challenges women encounter in securing senior positions within the Mtubatuba Local Municipality

The participants established that women experience diverse challenges in governance, especially in securing promotion into strategic leadership positions. These experiences were captured under Theme 3.

Table 4. Subthemes under Theme 3

Subthemes - Theme 3	Political domain contributors	Administrative domain contributors
The divergence between policy availability and implementation	PRCA, WCA	LMA, LMB, OA
	PRCA, WCA	

Political instability, corruption and male domination	PRCA	LMB LMA, LMB	balance (2000), the Local Gender Policy Framework (2006), the Employment Equity Act (1996) with the affirmative activity strategy and, the Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill (2011) still to be turned into law.
Hostile working environments	WCA	OA, OB, LMB	The participants generally agreed that at both the governmental level there were various instruments, including laws, policies and strategies that had been developed to facilitate the ascendancy of women into leadership positions. This was in accordance with the legislative requirements briefly highlighted above. The Municipality also had policies aimed at promoting women's leadership in resonance with national policies. Whilst the policies existed, they were not widely promoted or implemented:
Negative self-judgements and inspirational challenges	PRCA	OA, LMA	
Education and skills in political and governance leadership			

Notes: Sub-theme of Theme 3

4.3.1 The divergence between policy availability and implementation

The purpose of the Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, is to achieve equity in the workplace by promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment. This would eliminate unfair discrimination while implementing affirmative action measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by designated groups. The act is to ensure fair representation in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce. Another step in the advancement of women's empowerment and gender equity is that of the selection and enactment of significant arrangements and enactment. Among those are the National approach rules on women's empowerment and gender

"There is no promotion of policies and recruitment strategies that follow the 50:50 principles to ensure that there is gender balance among the two in terms of women empowerment". [PRCA]

WCA believed that in their content, the policies were adequate for supporting women's ascendancy into positions of power but were not being put into practice and LMA concurred with the view that the existing policies were not being put into practice describing this situation as a policy gap:

"There are several policies that are designed to strengthen the presence of women and their ability to secure strategic positions in the Municipality". [WCA] "The government policies for gender equity are available but the problem is the gap between policy and implementation at the spheres". [LMA]

LMB presented a slightly different view that existing policies were being implemented. It was the quality of implementation that resulted in their failure. Thus, there were two views on policy implementation – non-implementation and failed or unsuccessful implementation. Both resulted in the maintenance of the male dominance in leadership as the Municipality's status quo.

"There are policies, but the implementing is unprecedented as compared to the expected outcomes, there is failure to implement these policies, where it is characterized by absolute non-achievement". [LMB]

Political parties, as per the participants' experiences played a role in this poor policy implementation situation. Political parties in the Municipality failed to advance the policies for women empowerment as expected. This involves educating women on their rights and functions in ascending into leadership positions. This failure created limitations concerning leadership positions being attractive to women:

"Political parties fail to advance for the successful implementation of gender equality in the Municipality, men are seen to be powerful leaders as compared to women, there is a huge gap in the policy implementation system". [OB]

This view was also shared by Amon (2017) who believed that policies in political parties still fail to bridge the existing divergences in political leadership positions.

"There are women Line Managers that are recently employed in strategic positions, but there is still a gap in the implementation of gender equity policies at different structures, especially political portfolios women are less represented". [WCA]

LMA believed that gender equality policies meant to enhance women's ascendancy into political and governance leadership were not subjected to monitoring and evaluation processes. This has adversely affected the success of policies and strategies designed to support and facilitate women's leadership:

"Issues of lack of monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation are a key challenge as to ensure that the Municipality successful implement the policies". [LMA] "In the Municipality, there is awareness of the policies pertaining to the issues of gender balances and the redress, but the problem is that policies do not succeed or fail on their own merits because women are still afraid to ascend to top positions". [PRCA]

As articulated in SALGA policy documents, municipalities need to adapt and operate according to Act 108 of 1996 and the White Paper on local government Act 52 of 1997, present and seemingly understood in the Municipality. This paper has established that majority of these policies in MLM lack proper implementation. These policies do not help to fill the existing divergence in the Municipality. This is captured in the extracts from PRCA and OB's interview schedules.

4.3.2 Political instability, corruption and male domination

Gender power dynamics in the MLM are also discussed as a function of the general political instability that devils the Municipality. The consequential social and political disturbances of political infighting discourage women from taking leadership positions and roles when they emerge. This view is expressed by PRCA who stated that:

“Mtubatuba Municipality has always been seen as a politically unstable environment, women leaders are distancing themselves from the political wars, hence men tend to be dominant in the council than women”. [PRCA]

WCA also concurred with the above view adding that men had created an environment marred with the uncertainty that made it difficult for women to take leadership. Amid the political confusion and instabilities in the municipalities, women find themselves lost in the chaos. WCA also comments that women found it comparatively difficult to garner political support in vociferous, politically charged male-dominated councils and this, in turn, intimidated them.

Another reason why women were being excluded from top politico-administrative roles was their generally less corrupt nature. As per WCB’s views, women were less inclined to partake in corrupt activities. This positive trait was used against them by male counterparts who preferred to elevate persons who could readily yield to existing corruption-driven inner circles.

“Women are not easily convinced at work, and they are afraid to be part of the corrupt groups, so men are afraid of them to include them in their circles”. [WCB]

Under the above circumstances, the challenge highlighted in the paper is that to command respect, one had to be part of a cluster of corrupt individuals against one’s leadership perspectives and personal nature.

4.3.3 Limited role modelling and experiential learning opportunities

As furthered by OA, as most women did not participate in forums that could equip them, with the relevant leadership and governance skills, they lost the opportunity to acquire relevant political leadership experience:

“The majority of women do not have leadership roles in the Portfolio committees and Local Labour Forums, remember these committees and forums are supposed to train even ordinary people on working within the government”. [OA]

LMA also blamed patriarchal systems for not creating adequate opportunities for women to get political education if they chose to:

“Women are not having a place in the political leadership, political education of women itself is a skill that is lacking for creating opportunities for them to participate in decision-making”. [LMA]

Women are less recognised as heroes in the local government sphere compared to males. The challenge this created was twofold. Firstly, it denies up and coming women leaders the chance of being confidently mentored by other successful women leaders. Secondly, it adversely affected women’s leadership confidence. These challenges are highlighted by PRCA below who stated that:

“There are few women who are mentored or role models by other women in senior management”. [PRCA]

Women continue to lack adequate skills and experience for senior or leadership positions. The above view also takes the discussion to the roles of patriarchy in women’s leadership.

4.3.4 Hostile working environments

Unbalanced gender-power dynamics, patriarchal attitudes and cultural factors contributed to the creation of a generally hostile political and administrative workspace for women leaders and women aspiring to lead.

“Some Male employees exhibit negative attitude towards women participation, sometimes adoption of their ideas is difficult, and the implementation of the ideas is a problem. [PRCA]

Thus, even as leaders, the adverse working environment which LMA takes to be a function of traditionalism leads to a negative and hurtful classification of women within both the administrative and political workspace. The use of hard descriptions such as “incompetent” and “weak” in reference to women emphasises the harshness of the environment they work in as leaders:

“Traditionalism carries contradistinctive forces such as gender stereotyping, sexism tendencies that classify women as incompetent and emotionally weaker than men to lead in strategic positions”. [LMA]

It is therefore not surprising that some women chose lower-level administrative occupations in the Municipality to circumvent the more adversarial high-level positions:

“Women are more as interns and clerks because there is a scarcity of women who avail themselves for the senior positions”. [LMB]

4.3.5 Negative self-judgements and inspirational challenges

Amongst the participants, there were some views that women sometimes let themselves down by displaying negative traits and characteristics that impede their respect as political and administrative leaders. One such view was that women firstly failed to believe in themselves as leaders and secondly failed to believe in the leadership of other women as well. LMB was among the participants who expressed this notion:

“Women do not believe in other women's leadership; they still elect and support male counterparts in the process of governance and administrative structures. Those women who happen to be elected became alienated and hard to work with”. [LMB]

As per LMB's experiences, this attitude and frame of mind negatively affected the few women who ascended into administrative and political leadership as they felt alienated and unsupported by fellow women. This attitude, therefore, relates to the poor women leaders' support themes unveiled in this analysis but this time the lack of support is not from political and governance systems but from fellow women. The situation is further worsened by the view that some women supported the patriarchal dominance and the suppression of women leadership:

“Pity some women still support the trend” [OA]

Thus, women leaders are distrusted by other women in political structures while at the same time they felt undermined by male dominance. Such views however do

not go uncontested as other participants see women as confident and capable leaders who had already proven their leadership superiority ages ago. A lack of confidence exists in women's leadership in MLM women are undermined leading to low confidence. In the absence of effective leadership mentorship, such negative views are bound to persist given the deep entrenchment of male domination in leadership in MLM:

“Women in local government lack mentors and role models because the sector is predominantly a male dominant sector; such have become a challenge that hinders their professional development and growth”.

While a response from OA however notes that women should also appreciate and allow themselves to be inspired by other women outside the political realm who have succeeded in challenging patriarchal environments.

5. Discussion of Results

In resonance with the arguments set by many socialist feminist theorists, the paper highlights the gendered leadership nature of capitalist political systems (Armstrong, 2020; Napikoski, 2021). In such systems, males are considered the dominant gender and women as the supporting gender with patriarchy being an acceptable system affecting women of all classes (Armstrong, 2020). Relating the second theme to the theoretical framework, there is also an agreement between the two that current systems have failed to eradicate gender inequality in leadership positions (Napikoski, 2021) and such systems include labour movements and governments. As

highlighted by Oakton (n.d.) this perceived failure of liberalist systems to resolve gender equality was the main reason behind the emergence of socialist feminism as a different branch from liberal feminism (Napikoski, 2021). Thobejane (2015) also asserts that there is evidence of failure in South Africa's feminist-driven struggles a view widely associated with the emergence of socialist feminism. As per the social feminist view, gender inequality is structural. In this paper, it is shown that gender inequality is associated with class, with rural women being less considered for leadership compared to urban peers. The role of education in the oppression of women is also highlighted. Under socialist feminism, social cultures, political systems, governance structures, institutions of education and leadership are part of a networked system fully designed for male dominance (Napikoski, 2021).

This labyrinth is fully presented in this paper. As shown in the findings, women were poorly educated because of patriarchy and in turn were politically and administratively disadvantaged. In this regard, the socialist feminist theory helps to explain the intricate status quo characterised by the low participation of women in leadership. At the same time, the arguments by Thobejane (2015) that the end of apartheid and state-sponsored racism has not resulted in gender equality as premised by social feminists also holds in the MLM. Despite the local Municipality being Black African dominated, gender inequality and discrimination were severely notable. This argument thus points out that while the socialist feminist theory's views are applicable to the MLM, some like the association between racism and gender

inequality do not. On male dominance and low women engagement in municipal political and administrative structures, Eagly and Carli (2007) refer to a 'glass ceiling' metaphor that exists. This indicates several barriers that women encounter even before they deal with the glass ceiling. They contend that women and males do not have equal access to managerial and leadership positions. According to Carrol and Fox (2014) and Ramosunya (2020) women are restricted by male dominance in the public sector.

The lack of political backup for women's election in leadership positions reduces their development, therefore, active participation. This view by Carrol and Fox (2014) is believed to be true by PRCB, OA and WCB participants of this paper. In MLM, as experienced by some participants, the extent of women's leadership engagement and development was generally very slow. Patriarchy in political and governance systems was noted as a force too strong and a force that was not easy to dismantle even with the passage of time.

On the extent of leadership skills development in women over time subtheme, unlike in urban areas, most women in rural areas are illiterate, resulting in poverty and teenage pregnancy, leading to school dropouts and orphanhood. According to Sibeko (2018), most girls in MLM got pregnant at age 14 to 17 and did not return to school because they are from child-headed households (CHH), or they are orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). Such social dynamics affecting rural women's education have also affected their progression into leadership over time. According to Sibeko (2018) and Mokoena (2018), scarce skills in women are a nationwide concern. This phenomenon is worse in rural areas as

women lack access to science and technology. Sibeko's (2018) view strongly resonates with the finding on the scarcity of leadership skills among rural women.

The paper found views on the divergence between policy availability and implementation concerning low women leadership participation. The monitoring and evaluation challenge's view forwarded by LMA strongly agrees with Opstrips and Villdelse's (2015) argument that policies implemented in a jurisdiction may fail to bring about visible change quickly. The need to continuously review the progress and effectiveness of these policies cannot be over-emphasised as a means of ensuring they are effectively taking society towards desired targets (Opstrips & Villdelse, 2015). Dlanjwa (2018) also relates that local government level monitoring and evaluation of gender equality has been poor and ineffective. According to Matsiliza (2017), South African municipalities have been overwhelmed by service delivery challenges, poor planning and compliance with existing policies, and legislative framework relating to effective implementation of constitutional imperatives. This, in part, has affected their capacity to effectively implement anything.

On the finding on political instability, corruption and male domination, Krinzman' (2015) and Elias' (2018) view women as transformational leaders who were more likely to practice fairness and integrity than men. This transformational aspect is described as a positive leadership trait that can facilitate effective goal realisation. However, in contrast, in the findings above, women's transformational leadership traits are being used against them in the corrupt and unstable nature of MLM. A 2018 United Nations Women (UN Women) report titled

“Violence Against Women in Politics” popularises the concept of violence against women in politics (VAWP) asserting that it tended to stifle women's participation in the political space (UN Women, 2018). The same report strongly related VAWP with the common challenge of gender-based violence (GBV). With South Africa being listed as a society in which GBV occurs at alarmingly high frequencies, one can infer that women leaders’ decisions to back down from some political fights are in response to a manifestation of GBV within the political space as noted by UN Women.

On hostile working environments affecting women's leadership participation, Logel et al. (2012), states that negative stereotypes harm individual performance. Fitzgoral (2017) and Jones (2017), believe that males feel intimidated when they are doing similar jobs or occupying the same positions as women, so they hinder women’s growth. Such intimidation pushes them to act counterproductively against women leaders. In PRCB’s experiences, such counterproductive tendencies included excessive scrutinisation of women's efforts with the intent to find fault in them.

Concerning the negative self-judgements and inspirational challenges found in this paper, the view that personal confidence is a limiting factor in women's leadership is discussed by Mokoena (2018). Nidiffer, 2010 and Latu et al. (2019) alongside the ILO (2020) share similar sentiments on the importance of women's leadership role modelling. ILO (2020) notes that when women are elevated into power they become role models that can inspire girls and younger women to stride towards leadership and career success. With fewer women in leadership, such developmental

opportunities are lost. Overall, the findings cannot deny assertions that social systems are built on the oppression of women and call for fundamental changes in all systems including the political and public administration systems as per the socialist feminist viewpoint.

6. Conclusion and Suggestion

The findings showed that gender inequality was a major challenge affecting women’s ascendancy into leadership positions. The Municipality was found to be lacking in terms of supporting women leaders in both the political and administrative realms. This was mostly a result of a strong and pervading effect of patriarchy and traditional cultures in perpetuating inequalities in leadership representation. The paper showed unbalanced power dynamics in which males in leadership had more power than women in leadership. Also, the former exercised informal power that undermined the latter’s authority and influence. The power dynamics discussed were also a function of fewer women being in local government and politics. As men tended to nominate and vote for other men in committees, women were severely disadvantaged by low numbers.

There were also subthemes that political instability, corruption and male domination, hostile working environments, negative self-judgements and inspirational challenges among women and education and skills in political and governance leadership also affected women leadership in the MLM. The implications of the above are that rural municipalities lie the MLM will remain centres of gender exclusion where female leadership is curtailed. Women’s developmental roles will remain underrepresented denying whole

communities opportunities from benefitting from the services of competent female leaders whose voices will remain silenced.

To enhance women's participation there is a need to escalate and intensify the fight against patriarchy and cultural rigidities holding women leaders down. Political and administrative systems need to entrench strategies that eradicate violence against women in politics and political violence in general. Also, the same systems need to move far beyond formulating and politically grandstanding gender equality policies toward honest and committed implementation. Such implementation also requires objective monitoring and evaluation. The Municipality and political parties should re-focus its training on transformational programmes, which will promote gender tolerance. Training will help in creating a women-friendly working environment. The Municipality should collaborate with academic institutions to facilitate women-driven leadership programmes.

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