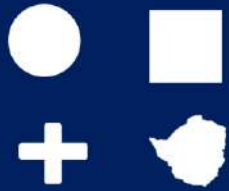


RESEARCH REPORT



**THE IMPACT OF GENDER
STEREOTYPES ON WOMEN'S
FULL PARTICIPATION IN
POLITICS IN ZIMBABWE
2022**





Introduction

This report outlines the outcomes of a research conducted by the Women’s Academy for Leadership and Political Excellence (WALPE) in partnership with the Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) titled *“The Impact of gender attitudes on women’s participation in politics in Zimbabwe”*. The research is an attempt to enrich the discourse on women’s participation in politics in Zimbabwe and to expand the available empirical literature on the subject, with a view to inform public policy. The report provides the contextual background to the research, the lenses of analysis used in the research, research methodology, research findings and the key conclusions and recommendations .

ABOUT WALPE



WALPE is a women's political empowerment and leadership academy set up to advance knowledge and deepen the capacity of women who want to successfully run for public elected positions. It seeks to provide women with technical and practical trainings that empower them to effectively run for public office. The academy is driven by the need to challenge the status quo, through creating platforms and opportunities for women to get into decision making and leadership positions.

- **Thematic Focus**
- **Capacity Building**
- **Knowledge Management**
- **Peace Building and Social Cohesion**
- **Social entrepreneurship**

ABOUT WLSA



Formed in 1989, Women and Law in Southern African Research and Education Trust (WLSA) Zimbabwe is the local Chapter of a sub-regional network.

Member countries comprise of Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

WLSA seeks to contribute to the sustained well-being of women and girls in Southern Africa through action-oriented research in the socio-legal field and advocating for women's rights.

Here action oriented research is intended to inform and influence actions being taken to improve the socio-legal situation of women and girl children.

WLSA's work incorporates action into research by questioning and challenging the law, instigating campaigns for changes in law and in policies, educating women about their rights, providing legal advice and sensitizing communities and their leadership during the course of the research on issues of gender.



Contextual Background

The Legal background

Participation of women in politics in Zimbabwe is guaranteed by national, regional and international pieces of legislation , policies, protocols and statutes.

At the national level, the Zimbabwean Constitution explicitly guarantees gender equality and equity in Sections 17, 56 and 80 . Section 17 of the Constitution directs that:

“the state must promote gender balance to ensure that women fully participate in all the various spheres of Zimbabwean society.”

Section 56 of the Zimbabwe Constitution guarantees gender equality and non-discrimination . Section 56:2 stipulates that:

“Women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres’



Contextual Background

Section 56:3 goes on to say:

“Every person has the right not to be treated in an unfairly discriminatory manner on such grounds as their nationality, race, colour, tribe, place of birth, ethnic and social origin, language, class, religious belief, political affiliation, opinion, custom, culture, sex, gender, marital status, age, pregnancy, disability or economic or social status or whether they were born in or out of wedlock”

Section 80 also guarantees full and equal dignity of the person for both men and women including equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities.

The section further states that:

“all laws, customs, traditions and cultural practices that infringe the rights of women conferred by this Constitution are void to the extent of the infringement”



Contextual Background

At the Southern African Development Community (SADC) level, the Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections and SADC Protocol on Gender and Development further guarantee gender equality in politics and decision making.

At the continental level, there are various instruments that guarantee gender equality and women's rights. These instruments include the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) , African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women In Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG).

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) provides the foundation upon which later instruments that promote gender equality are based.

These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA), Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) number 5 on gender equality.

The Reality



Despite the progressive legal provisions outlined above, women in Zimbabwe continue to face discrimination in politics on the basis of gender. Zimbabwe continues to lag behind on gender equality. Women in Zimbabwe constitute 52% of the total population and yet this numerical advantage has not been translated into the number of leadership positions occupied by women.

From the 2018 election results, only 13.3% of the 1958 ward councillors were women, 48% of the senatorial seats were occupied by women and 31.5% of the 270 National Assembly seats were occupied by women.

These appalling figures that are not in sync with the national demographical data are an indictment on the country's commitment to achieving gender equality and equity.

Social and cultural practices rooted in patriarchy, low levels of education and limited financial muscle are some of the inhibiting factors that continue to stall progress on gender equality.

The Rationale

This research was therefore commissioned to further investigate the perennial problem of low levels of women participation in politics, with a particular focus on gender attitudes in society and how these influence participation of women.

The research intends to inform public policy in Zimbabwe and to make recommendations to various stakeholders who include political parties, policy makers, traditional and religious leaders, independent commissions that support democracy and civil society organisations.



Lenses of Analysis and Theoretical Framework

The research heavily borrows from social psychology and in particular Eagly (1987) social role theory that explains behavior of women and men as well as stereotypes, attitudes and ideologies that are relevant to sex and gender. The theory posits that gender stereotypes develop from the gender division of labor that characterize societies.

This theory has become a pre-eminent theory of gender in social psychology. The psychology of gender reflects its centrality in understanding social behavior.



Lenses of Analysis and Theoretical Framework

Gender stereotypes are understood as beliefs about the attributes of women and men.

Research has identified two primary dimensions of gender stereotypes as agency and communion. The analysis of agency reveals the facets of independence, instrumental competence and leadership competence whilst communion yields the facets of concern for others, sociability and emotional sensitivity. Other researches consider intersectionality between gender and other social attributes as well as prescriptive aspect of gender stereotypes by which they define what members of each sex should and should not do.

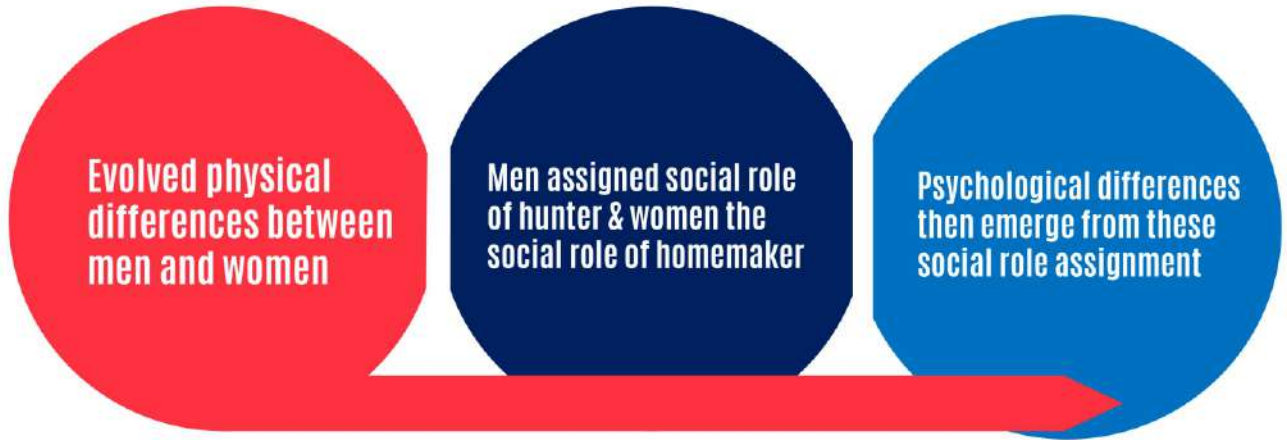
Eagly and Karau (2002) posit that female gender stereotype is generally inconsistent with leadership roles because of the societal expectations that women are communal and that leaders, like men, are agentic. Consequently, women suffer discrimination in leadership because many believe they are insufficiently agentic to be effective leaders. Vial and Napien show that society values agentic traits as opposed to communal traits in leadership and therefore confirming women's disadvantage in attaining leadership roles.

Social Role Theory (Eagly and Wood 1999)

Evolved physical differences between men and women

Men assigned social role of hunter & women the social role of homemaker

Psychological differences then emerge from these social role assignment



Research Methodology

The research used a qualitative methodology due to the in-depth and descriptive information required on the impact of gender attitudes on the participation of women in politics.

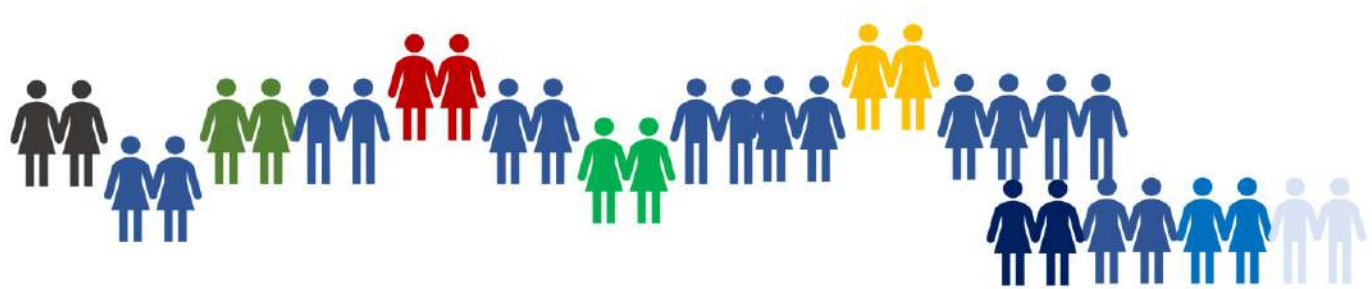
Sampling

The research made use of purposive sampling to identify research respondents.

A total of 150 people were interviewed from all the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe.

The targeted respondents included political party representatives, councillors, mayors, MPs, civil society leaders, traditional and religious leaders, members of the Ministry of Women Affairs, women-led community based organisations, men, youth, women with disabilities and aspiring women leaders among others.

The research relied on the vast knowledge and networks of the commissioning organisation to access data and information.



Data Collection

A total of 100 in-depth interviews and five focus group discussions each with 10 participants were conducted to harvest information and views on the subject.

An interview guide was developed and used for the in-depth interviews.

The research instruments were first tested in one of the target provinces before they were used.

The research instruments were also translated to local languages to ensure full comprehension by the respondents whilst respondents were asked to use languages of their choice during the interviews. The research team also undertook a comprehensive desktop review of relevant data from secondary sources such as researches done by other organisations and national and international surveys.

This information was triangulated with the primary data collected from interviews to strengthen the research reliability.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The research thematically analysed the data collected from both in-depth interviews and desktop review before producing this report.

Ethical Considerations

Research respondents were requested to sign consent forms before participating in the research. The research team also explained in detail the purpose of the research to all targeted respondents. Information gathered was used only for the purposes of this research.

Research Limitations

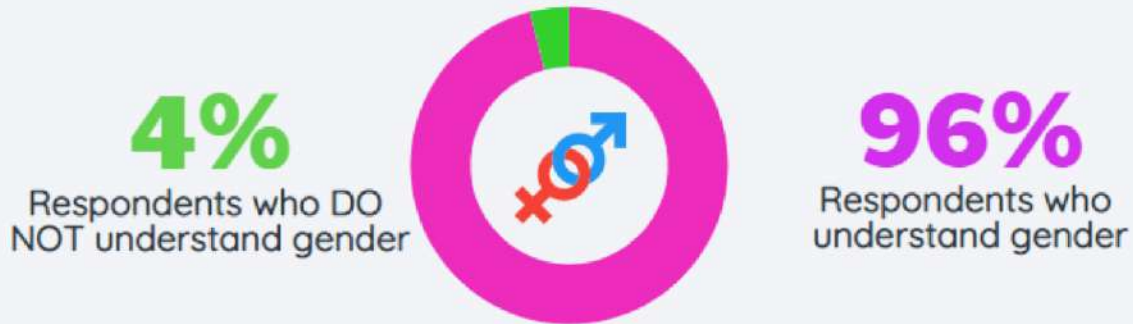
The research was conducted in a COVID19 environment and therefore there were challenges encountered as the research team tried to access the targeted respondents. Some participants were also not keen on participating in the research due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, the research team was able to use data collection methods that abided by the COVID19 regulations. Participants and the research team also wore face masks during the interviews as well as used hand sanitizers and respected physical distancing to prevent the spread of the virus.

Research Findings

Conceptual Understanding of Gender

The majority of respondents understood the meaning of gender.

Knowledge of gender as a concept





Understanding Gender Attitudes

The following were some of the definitions that respondents provided:

- Socially constructed characteristics of men and women such as roles, norms and relationships
- Differences in sexes (male and female)
- Range of characteristics pertaining to femininity and masculinity.
- What society expects from a woman or man in terms of behaviour.
- Roles assigned to humanity on the basis of their sex.
- Relations between men and women, both perceptual and material.
- Social and cultural differences between men and women.
- Differentiated roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women in society.
- How society views a woman or a man according to the roles and responsibilities that attached to their sex.
- Classification of human beings and the differences attached to them.
- Roles of men and women.
- Cultural and traditional definition of men and women.
- The socially constructed roles , behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men and gender diverse people.

Understanding Gender Attitudes

- Views held by society regarding roles of women and men in society.
- How society expects men and women to behave.
- How society does not value women and do not give them opportunities.
- Behaviours of men and women in the private and public realms.
- How people react to what men and women do in society.
- Societal attitudes towards socially constructed roles.
- Views held by individuals on what roles a man or a woman should play.
- The way society responds to the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of men and women.
- Perceptions on what women and men should do in society based on their sex.

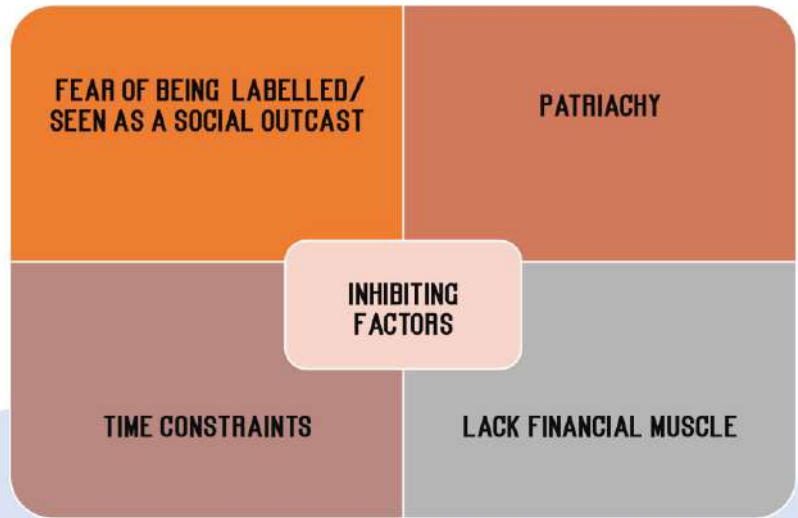
Roles of women in society

Consistent with the social role theory, the research found out that women were seen as less agentic and more communal. The following are some of the roles that respondents identified as roles of women in society:



Relationship between roles of women and their participation in politics

98% of the research respondents viewed the roles that women are ascribed by society as a hindrance to their full participation in political life. The majority of respondents mentioned the time factor and the fact that women's roles in society are time consuming thereby leaving no time for them to participate in other activities. The following figure shows the four main inhibiting factors that were raised by the research respondents:



The following were some of the quotes from the research respondents

The respondents emphasised more on how unpaid care and domestic work is a great hindrance to their participation in development processes especially in rural areas.

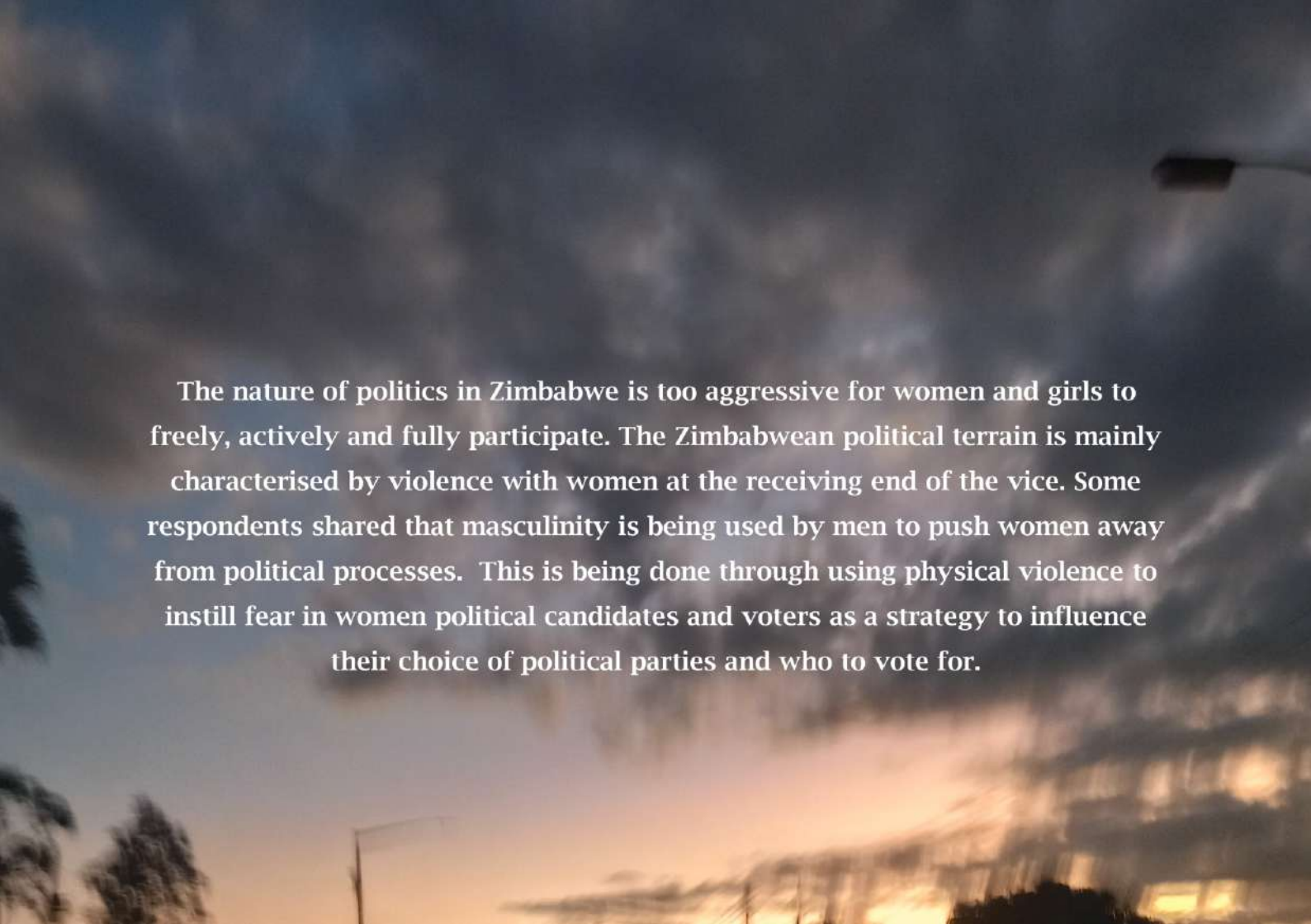
Women and girls spend more time on UCDW, for instance travelling more than 5 kilometres to fetch water and look for firewood to prepare meals daily. Fetching water is a day to day responsibility for women therefore women and girls fail or do not have time to attend community development meetings. The respondents indicated how it is important for UCDW to be recognised, reduced, redistributed and represented to enable women and girls to take part in leadership and developmental processes.

Lack of representation for women in political processes is imbibed within patriarchal values and norms that draw women back from participating effectively.



The respondents highlighted that if you are a married woman you have to seek approval and permission from your husband to take part and if he refuses a woman cannot go against that. Women who do not have husbands also have to seek approval from male family members to seek permission and cannot also go against that.

Therefore this impacts negatively on the percentages of women who participate in leadership processes.



The nature of politics in Zimbabwe is too aggressive for women and girls to freely, actively and fully participate. The Zimbabwean political terrain is mainly characterised by violence with women at the receiving end of the vice. Some respondents shared that masculinity is being used by men to push women away from political processes. This is being done through using physical violence to instill fear in women political candidates and voters as a strategy to influence their choice of political parties and who to vote for.

Financial constraints stood out as one of the major factors negatively affecting the participation of women in political processes. Some of the respondents shared that politics in Zimbabwe is usually marked by vote buying yet women in most and not all cases do not have the resources to spare as they are the major caregivers at family level. Voters in Zimbabwe especially during political parties' primary elections mainly vote for candidates that give them resources such as money and income generating projects to buy their votes.

“

“Women have no time to participate in politics because of their overbearing housework. It is very difficult to juggle leadership duties and housework”

Ministry of Women Affairs official..

“The societal attitudes that say a man is a leader and women must always be at home deter women from stepping up and taking leadership roles for fear of being labelled a social outcast”

Male Councillor..

“

“The very notion that men are seen to be superior than women deter women from becoming leaders. They are socialized to think they are followers and not leaders”

Traditional leader..

“Women lack financial muscle to contest in leadership positions because most of their time is spent on unpaid work”

Female political activist..

Nevertheless, two percent of the respondents were of the view that culture was not in a flux and societal attitudes towards women were slowly changing with some women challenging these societal attitudes and taking up leadership positions.

One of the respondents said

“

There is also the thinking that because women have the capacity to understand different dynamics at family level, they can use their experience in the home, at community or national level. Because they are natural carers, they can be empathetic leaders to the benefit of society’

Male religious leader..

Societal attitudes on participation of women in politics

The research respondents raised both negative and positive societal attitudes affecting women participation in politics. The societal attitudes were largely in compliance with the agentic roles of men and the communion role of women.

The second issue pertains to levels of trust in a range of important institutions within our democracy. The social attitudes in women's participation in politics can also be attributed to levels of trust of the democratic process, gender and social inclusion portrayed in the process. The game of politics has been loosely labelled as dirty, corrupt and violent.

The following table shows some of the societal views attitudes that were expressed by research respondents:

Negative

1. "Political participation is for men"
2. "Women are not born leaders. They are not natural leaders"
3. "The place of women is in the kitchen"
4. "Communities see women as not meant for leadership"
5. "They think women who participate in politics are prostitutes and people of loose morals who go up the ladder through sexual favours"
6. "Women in politics are seen as too aggressive, arrogant, domineering and stubborn"
7. "Seen as uncultured women who have abandoned their culture" that says leadership is for men"
8. "They are often likened to men and not seen as women"
9. "Society fear that women in politics will domineer at family level and will start controlling their husbands and therefore discourage women from taking up leadership roles"

Positive

1. "Some admire women leaders because they are seen as honest, less corrupt and more concerned with the people's plight hence will represent them well"
2. "Women are more caring leaders and more responsive to public policy issues than men. They make better leaders"
3. "Seen as brave and strong because politics is not for the fainthearted"
4. "It should be the new normal , culture is in a flux, is dynamic and everchanging"

Assessment of Government's Interventions in promoting gender equality

The majority of research respondents were of the view that government was not doing enough in advancing gender equality in Zimbabwe. 70% of the research respondents posited that government was paying lip service to gender equality as the Constitution of Zimbabwe that provides for 50% representation of women was not being implemented. Instead, government had extended the transitional quota system of 60 out of 270 Parliamentary seats for women.

Alignment of laws to the constitution was being done at a snail pace. Political violence was also raised as one of the issues that was inhibiting women from participating in politics and the Government of Zimbabwe was not holding perpetrators to book and ensuring that the political space is a safe space for all citizens.

Respondents expressed disappointment that government was not regulating political parties to ensure 50% gender representation in all political positions.

Nevertheless 30% of the research respondents highlighted that there were positives that could also be identified. These included the adoption of a progressive Constitution in 2013, the appointment of women into key ministries such as Minister of Information and Minister of Defence, the quota system in Parliament and Council and allowing organizations to work with women and capacitate them in communities.

Research Way Forward and Recommendations

The research findings as presented above were consistent with the social role theory as put forward by Eagly. The research identified two gender stereotypes associated with men and women namely agency and communion. Whilst men were largely seen as agentic characterised by independence, instrumental competence and leadership competence, women were seen as more communion characterised by concern for others, sociability and emotional sensitivity.

This research revealed that female gender stereotype is generally inconsistent with leadership roles because society expects women to be communal and men to be agentic and therefore be in leadership positions.

As a result of societal expectations, women tend to suffer discrimination in leadership because many think

that they are insufficiently agentic to be effective leaders. Women who go against this thinking and take up leadership positions are often labelled as uncultured, promiscuous, aggressive and stubborn among other derogatory terms as this research has shown. Society values agentic traits than communal traits and therefore disadvantaging women in leadership.

Nevertheless, the research has also shown that culture is in a flux and is dynamic and ever changing. A lesser amount of research respondents revealed that societal views on women leadership were evolving and becoming positive. Society is beginning to appreciate that communal traits could also be useful in leadership.

Based on the research findings, this research makes the following recommendations to the Government of Zimbabwe:

- Implementation of the Constitution of Zimbabwe in letter and spirit.
- Alignment of the Electoral Law to the Constitution, in particular the provisions on gender equality and 50% representation of women.
- Regulation of political parties to abide with gender equality and 50% representation provisions in the Constitution of Zimbabwe. Government may also incentivize political parties to meet the gender thresholds.
- Put in place policies to protect women from harassment in the political sphere.
- Provide more leadership opportunities to women.
- Put in place concrete mechanisms to end violence against women so as to encourage women to participate in politics. This include holding perpetrators to account.
- Socialization: Awareness raising of gender equality in communities including in schools through civic education as provided for in Section 7 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe
- Providing economic empowerment opportunities to women for them to build their financial muscle needed for political campaigns

The research also makes the following recommendations to Civil Society Organisations and specifically women's groups:

Educate communities on gender equality through civic education

- Advocate and lobby for the implementation of the Constitution, alignment of laws to the Constitution and enactment of gender sensitive legislation , regulations and policies.
- Mobilise resources for women candidates including deliberate economic empowerment projects.
- Conduct programs such as 'He for She' Campaigns through identifying male champions that can speak on gender issues and help in reaching out to a wider audience of men.
- Build capacity of women on leadership skills so as to increase numbers of women stepping up for leadership positions.

Recommendations to Political parties;

- They must align their gender policies with section 17, 56 and 80 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe and make sure women are equally represented in all leadership positions from top to bottom
- They must criminalise all forms of violence against women in politics and bar perpetrators from ever holding any position.
- Should be at the forefront of mainstreaming gender equality in all their programming and guarantee 50/50 representation even on most senior positions.
- Are expected to educate their members on the importance of creating a conducive environment for women to fully participate in politics.
- Must raise awareness on the implications of unpaid care and domestic work on women's active and meaningful participation in political processes and urge men and boys to lift the burden on women.
- Encourage their members to be gender champions and lead in supporting women to take up leadership. Adopt zebra (50/50) model of leadership where its either a woman on top or vice versa throughout all political party positions.
- Mandate their MPs to align the constitution with the electoral act and empower ZEC to reject political party lists that do not reflect gender balance doing elections.

Recommendations for traditional and religious leaders.

- Understand that culture evolves and lead in doing away with some old retrogressive social norms, behaviours and attitude that treat women as second class citizens.
- Must make sure citizens under their jurisdiction respect women and girls and treat them as equal citizens with same rights as men.
- Deal with cases of abuse of women and girls in a fair manner and ensure perpetrators face justice.
- Take a lead in advocating for an end to child marriages and alert authorities where such cases are recorded.
- Must allow and create safe spaces for women to take up leadership roles and responsibilities in their communities and endorse female candidates who choose to run for public office.

info@walpe.org.zw

[Twitter@walpeacademy](https://twitter.com/walpeacademy)

Facebook: Women's Academy For Leadership and Political Excellence

+263 782 122 831

www.walpe.org.zw