



**Spotlight
Initiative**
To eliminate violence
against women and girls



GENDER REPRESENTATION AND LEADERSHIP AUDIT: ZAMBIA 2025

Fact sheet

This fact sheet summarises the key findings of the Gender Representation and Leadership Audit conducted in December 2025 by the Non-governmental Gender Organisations' Coordinating Council (NGOCC) with support from UNFPA. The audit assessed the representation of women and men in key leadership positions across Zambia's public and private sectors at national and local levels.

Key headline findings

Despite constitutional commitments and a decade of gender parity at the Presidency/Vice-Presidency level, women remain significantly underrepresented in most spheres of decision-making.

National Assembly	12%	Women hold only 12% of elected/nominated parliamentary seats
Local government	7%	Women constitute a mere 7% of ward councillors
Cabinet	18%	Women make up just 18% of the Cabinet
Public and quasi-government institutions	0%	Women make up 0% of sampled institutions that have a female Board Chairperson
Universities	0%	0% of sampled universities have a female Vice-Chancellor
Security and defence	0%	0% of Commander/Deputy Commander positions are held by women in the Army, Air Force, and National Service
District and community level	0% to 36%	Women's representation on key development committees (WDCs, CDF committees, DDCCs) ranges from 0% to 36% in sampled districts

Detailed sectoral snapshot

Public sector	Key position	Women (%)	Men (%)
Executive	Cabinet Ministers	18	82
	Permanent Secretaries	24	76
	District Commissioners	21	79
National Assembly	MPs	12	88
	Parliamentary Committee Chairs	22	78
Local Government	Ward Councillors	7	93
	Mayors/Chairs	12	88
Judiciary	Supreme Court Judges	36	64
	High Court Judges	51	49
Security/Defence	Top Commanders	0	100
Public Commissions	Board Chairs (sampled)	50	50

Private/Other sectors	Key position	Women (%)	Men (%)
Banking	CEOs (sampled)	36	64
	Board Chairs	21	79
Telecoms	CEOs	0	100
Media (TV/Radio/Print)	Heads	29-40	60-71
Universities	Vice-Chancellors	0	100
	Deputy Vice-Chancellors	25	75
CSOs	CEOs	63	37
	Board Chairs	75	25

Community and district levels (Data from 8 sampled districts)

Position/committee	Women's representation range	Notes
Provincial Development Coordinating Committee (PDCC)	15% - 37.5%	Best performing level
District Development Coordinating Committee (DDCC)	0% - 36%	Some districts have zero
Constituency Development Fund (CDF) Committee	21% - 44%	Highest average range
Ward Development Committee (WDC)	1% - 31%	Lowest minimum
Traditional Leaders (Senior Chiefs)	0% - 25%	Patriarchal stronghold



Picture: Gender Division Permanent Secretary, Mainga Kabika, on 16th March, 2025, presented a report on Zambia's progress toward gender equality and equity during the sixty-ninth (69) session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York City, United States of America.

Key barriers to women's leadership

The audit identifies persistent and intersecting barriers:

1. **Structural and cultural:** Deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and societal attitudes that favour male leadership and relegate women to domestic spheres.
2. **Economic:** The high cost of politics and campaigning, combined with women's limited access to financial resources, effectively excludes them from elected positions.
3. **Political:** Male-dominated political party structures, biased candidate selection, and widespread political violence, intimidation, and hate speech targeting women.
4. **Institutional:** "Old boys' networks" in corporate and public appointments, and a lack of enforcement of existing gender policies.
5. **Educational and pipeline:** A shallow talent pool in senior academic ranks (e.g., professors) and STEM fields, from which top leaders like Vice-Chancellors and bank CEOs are often drawn.
6. **Barriers at local level:** In the eight sampled districts, the following are the barriers that FGDs identified as hindering women from attaining leadership positions:
 - 6.1. Women get less support from family members and the community
 - 6.2. Lack of confidence amongst women
 - 6.3. Higher illiteracy levels amongst women
 - 6.4. Negative social-cultural attitudes discouraging women from taking up leadership positions
 - 6.5. Women do not have enough financial resources to vie for elective decision-making positions such as councillor
 - 6.6. Fewer women are appointed or promoted to take up government positions
 - 6.7. Women are burdened with household and community responsibilities; hence, they have less time to participate in governance processes

Bright spots and positive trends

Executive parity	Judicial success	Public commissions	Civil society leadership
Zambia has maintained a gender-balanced Presidency and Vice-Presidency for the last 10 years (since 2015).	The Judiciary stands out, with women holding over 50% of judgeships in superior courts (High Court and Court of Appeal).	Four out of eight sampled public commissions are chaired by women, with several having gender-balanced boards.	CSOs, particularly women's rights organisations, demonstrate that intentional policies and mentorship work, achieving high levels of women's leadership.

Call to action: Key recommendation

1. **Enact and enforce legislative quotas:** Pass laws mandating 50% gender parity for all appointive positions and requiring political parties to field gender-balanced candidate lists.
2. **Reform the political environment:** Enforce stricter penalties for political violence and establish a campaign finance fund to support women candidates.
3. **Mandate private sector targets:** Introduce corporate governance codes that require disclosure of gender metrics and set ambitious, time-bound targets for women in senior management and on boards.
4. **Invest in the pipeline:** Expand scholarships and mentorship for women in STEM, finance, and academia to build a larger pool of qualified candidates for top leadership roles.
5. **Local level district recommendations:**
 - a. Launch grassroots mobilization: Conduct sustained civic education and support programmes to increase women's participation in local governance structures like WDCs and CDF committees.
 - b. Encourage family and community members to render support to the few women in leadership
 - c. Sensitise community members on the importance of women's participation in leadership; encouraging more women to take up leadership positions;
 - d. Build capacities of women on leadership skills
 - e. Encourage women to take up adult literacy classes
 - f. Provide mentorship to young women interested in becoming leaders
 - g. Change systems and practices that inhibit women's participation in leadership, such as scheduling meetings at times convenient for women to attend.

Conclusion:

The 2025 Gender Representation and Leadership Audit establishes a baseline across Zambia's public, private, and local governance sectors. While key bright spots, such as superior court judgeships, executive parity, public commission leadership, and civil society, show that targeted policies work, deep disparities persist. Women hold only 12% of parliamentary seats, 18% of Cabinet positions, 7% of local ward council seats, and 0% of university vice-chancellorships, telecom CEO positions, and top security command posts.

These gaps are reinforced by deeply rooted patriarchal norms, high campaign costs, male-dominated political structures, political violence, domestic burdens, and limited talent pipelines. Overcoming them would require enacting 50% legislative gender quotas, reforming campaign finance, enforcing penalties for political violence, establishing corporate governance targets, and investing in scholarships. At the local level, sustained civic education, leadership capacity building, adult literacy, mentorship, and convenient meeting schedules are critical.

The audit makes clear that voluntary measures fall short. Enforcing decisive, systemic reforms is essential to achieving true gender parity and securing women's equal participation in national decision-making.