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A COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: THE CASE OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA

Abstract

Gender representativity in political and managerial positions in local government in general and women empowerment in particular remain contentious issues. Although an extensive statutory and regulatory framework for gender equality was established and despite the fact that specific equity targets are set, it is evident that much more needs to be done to facilitate women empowerment in the local government sector. The purpose of this article is to reflect on findings of an empirical survey conducted amongst female politicians, managers, and experts in the local government sector with the aim to design the parameters of a competency framework for women empowerment. The results support the fact that a women empowerment competency framework should incorporate various dimensions and elements, notably sector-specific job requirements, registered gender-based formal programs in the tertiary education sector, as well as content of women empowerment initiatives taken by non-governmental organizations.

Keywords

competency framework, women empowerment, local government, South Africa, municipalities

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INTRODUCTION

The Women in Local Government Summit (2005) developed a resolution that efforts must be made to “enhance the representation and participation of women in local government”. This led to the Benoni Declaration calling for 50/50 representation of women. Furthermore, the Gender Policy Framework for Local Government (COGTA, 2015) aims to facilitate and enable gender mainstreaming wherein gender-inclusive policy formulation, planning, budgeting, programming, monitoring and evaluation in local government can take place. To support these and other initiatives aimed at women empowerment, it is essential that a comprehensive competency framework be designed to address the perceived skills and competency deficit of women in political and senior managerial positions in local government. Such a framework should thus address gender mainstreaming challenges faced by women in local government and make provision for women empowerment initiatives. The framework should also promote female collaboration and the sharing of experiences with the aim to find answers to gender-related challenges. Finally, such a program should guide municipalities in developing gender action plans based on the particular challenges that women experience.

The purpose of this article is to reflect on the approach, methodology, and processes followed to develop a competency framework for women empowerment in the South African local government sector. A desktop survey, document analyses, and an empirical investigation were conducted in selected municipalities in the sector to obtain input regarding the experiences of women in political and managerial positions. The survey was cross-referenced and supplemented by a questionnaire distributed to experts in the field of gender and local government to obtain broader perspectives regarding women empowerment in the local sphere of government.

1. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: FOUNDATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Empowerment as social construct focuses scholarly attention on practices that would allow people to gain control over their lives (Collins, 2002, p. 23; Duflo, 2012, p. 1052). Zimmerman (1995, p. 583) and Adams (1996, p. 5) regard empowerment as “the means by which individuals, groups and/or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their goals”. Empowerment has further been associated with the commitment towards challenging all forms of oppression. Pease (2002, p. 136) in this regard argues that structural oppression impacts individuals and hampers their ability to control their lives, which in turn influences their ability to participate fully in economic, social and political processes. According to Carr (2003, p. 9), empowerment theory finds its origins in developmental psychology, but recently moved into the spheres of gender and feminist studies. Also Pease (2002, p. 137) and Duflo (2012, p. 1054) maintain that empowerment should include social change, which sees the redistribution of power from the political elites to “oppressed” segments of society (i.e. women).

Carr (2003) contends that empowerment should be understood as “both a process and an outcome where the individual who is to be empowered is at the foundation of the process” (p. 8). Empowerment as process, according to Gutierrez (1990, p. 149), is specifically salient to empowering women to participate equally in all spheres of society. In this respect, Cornwall (1997), Kabeer (2005, pp. 14-15) and Syed (2010, p. 283) caution that women should not be regarded as a homogenous group and specifically warn against using measures such as the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) in making universal assumptions across

different political, social, economic and cultural contexts. GEM is specifically used by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a composite measure for gender inequality taking into account three basic dimensions of empowerment, namely “economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making, and power over economic resources”. Syed (2010) argues that the use of these dimensions are inherently flawed as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. GEM dimensions and their inherent biases

Source: Syed (2010).

Limitation	Description
Capitalist bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Important non-economic dimensions of empowerment such as literacy rates and qualifications, physical autonomy and position within the household, are ignored. Non-economic value of position within the household is ignored. Because of the measurement of absolute income, a poor country would never achieve a high value even if pay equity existed between the genders”.
Elite bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Participation of women in grassroots organizations is not recognized. Employment in the informal sector is not considered. Gender inequalities among the less economically advanced population are not taken into account”.
Secular bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “GEM does not consider the traditional gender roles assigned to religions. The context and content of gender empowerment in traditional Muslim and other religious communities are not considered”.
Similarity bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GEM treats men and women as equal and gender diversity is not seen as important. Since this hetero-normative perspective on gender is imposed, the same outcomes for men and women are expected. Pathways towards equal opportunities remain problematic if diversity and the need for flexibility in both women and men’s life cycles and domestic commitments are not considered.

Mosse (1993, p. 86) argues that gender and development should focus on addressing the triple op-

pression faced by women in developing countries, namely gender, class and race. While colonialism in most developing countries relegated women's equality to be achieved after economic and political freedom were won, post-colonial economies have to struggle with closing the economic gap between rich and poor, with rural women comprising the largest sections of the rural poor. Cornwall (1997, p. 9) maintains that a gender and development perspective allows women to be integral in the development planning, while promoting gender analysis tools such as gender budgeting may contribute to a more integrated development policy framework.

Despite the above concerns with the use of empowerment and gender and development theories as foundational to the development and advancement of women, empowerment theory allows for the differentiated perspective in addressing the unequal relations between the genders (Hall, 2010, p. 67). At a macro-level, it allows for consideration to be given to legal, political, economic and social empowerment. At a meso-level, organizations are able to understand and address inequality through legal compliance, diversity policies, flexibility and equity-related policies targeting specific women. At the micro-level, empowerment theory promotes an enhanced understanding of intersectionality, identity and agency, autonomy and literacy as building blocks towards achieving gender equality within society.

According to Collins (2002, p. 28), "the empowerment of women concerns women gaining power and control of their own lives, involving awareness raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control of resources and actions to transform the structures and institutions, which reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality". Although empowerment is commonly regarded as "coming from within", it cannot be achieved in a vacuum (Hall, 2010, p. 11). A key enabler for successful empowerment of women in an agency, such as local government, for example, is an organizational culture conducive to structural and psychological empowerment.

South Africa has established a comprehensive statutory and regulatory framework to guide women

empowerment. Specific legislation in this regard include:

- Labor Relations Act 66 of 1995;
- Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997;
- Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998;
- Skills Development Act 97 of 1998;
- Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000; and
- Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill, 2013.

Apart from national legislation, Government also established a national gender machinery through which it aims to implement the various policies and legislation promoting the advancement of women. This machinery comprises:

- the national and provincial Offices on the Status of Women (OSWs) that are established in the offices of the President and the Premiers, respectively;
- the Gender Focal Points (GFPs) and Women's Forums in both national and provincial departments;
- the Parliamentary Women's Group (PWG) and the Women's Empowerment Units/Committees and the Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life of Women in Provincial Legislatures; and
- the Ministry of Women, as established through the announcement of the members of the South African National Executive.

2. GENDER-SPECIFIC COMPETENCY FRAMEWORKS

Competencies can be regarded as the knowledge, skills and behavior that facilitate organizational success (Sharma & Bhatnagar, 2009,

p. 119). In an organizational setting, competency management generally entails the identification of abilities that enable managers to differentiate between high and average achievers and then to design a competency framework for training, capacity building and development (Hood & Lodge, 2004). A competency framework can be regarded as a model that outline performance domains within occupational categories in an organization (McCarthy & Fitzpatrick, 2009, p. 347).

The causal link between women empowerment and competency is well documented (see Kar, Pascual, & Chickering, 1999; Mezirow, 2002; Kathija, 2003; Romero et al., 2006). The more competent women become (e.g. through education and training), the more empowered they generally become to affect changes in their lives. Kabeer (2005, p. 16) argues that access to education (whether formal or non-formal) brings about the cognitive ability for women to question, reflect on and act on conditions in their lives that cause a feeling of disempowerment. Access to learning increases women's ability to look after themselves and those within their charge better. Importantly, however, is that access to learning changes power dynamics inside and outside household settings, while simultaneously increasing women's ability to engage social organizations, including government agencies.

A competency framework for women empowerment broadly describes competency domains, standards and, in general, performance excellence within an organization. Each competency domain defines, in generic terms, excellence in occupational behavior and makes provision for benchmarks against which participants are assessed (Bartunek & Spreitzer, 2006, p. 258). Competency frameworks are further typically divided into three main clusters of development. These clusters are fundamental, core and elective domains. Fundamental competencies (i.e. personal development) and core competencies (i.e. interpersonal development) provide the foundation for frameworks. Functional competencies are typically informed by responsibilities and particular assignments allocated to employees for a specific position, and are also defined by levels of development (i.e. the job com-

plexity and level of authority). The clusters and related competencies are intended to be discrete and cumulative, with each cluster building on the previous cluster, i.e. first the fundamental cluster, followed by the core cluster and, finally, the elective cluster (Adams, 2008, p. 58). The elective cluster typically makes provision for levels of development (i.e. senior, middle and junior) (Benini, 2008, p. 125).

Research has shown that the need for development (e.g. education and training) at the personal and interpersonal levels is essential for empowering women, emphasizing the critical need for self-leadership, emotional intelligence and social skills such as leadership and motivation (Haleh, 1998; Benini, 2008). Therefore, the fundamental and core areas of development can be regarded as compulsory domains for candidates who enroll for women empowerment programs.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Following a qualitative research design, the purpose of the empirical investigation was as follows:

1. Phase 1: To perform a desktop survey regarding women empowerment and competencies through formal and non-formal programs in the South African higher education sector (data set 1).
2. Phase 2: To obtain input from women in political and administrative/managerial positions as well as experts in the field of women empowerment regarding their perceptions of existing competency deficits and their suggestions of key competencies that should be included in a competencies framework aimed at women empowerment in local government (data set 2).
3. Phase 3: To design a competency framework for empowerment in local government as synthesis of data sets 1 and 2.

The purposively sampled targets groups for phase 2 comprised of the following:

Target group 1 ($n = 156$):

- women in political leadership positions, including portfolio and standing committees (i.e. councillors) ($n = 58$) (2-3 per sampled municipality); and
- women in administrative/managerial positions e.g. HODs, Directors, Senior Managers ($n = 98$). Four participants per 26 sampled municipalities were selected (i.e. 104). However, smaller local municipalities do not all have these positions in place, hence $n = 98$.

Target group 2 ($n = 26$):

- experts in the field of gender-based affairs, women empowerment, and training programmes in local government;
- chairs of committees responsible for gender affairs;
- NGOs and other stakeholders involved in gender-based initiatives in government and the private sector; and
- Directors, corporate services and HODs of human resource departments.

The second target group was included to obtain a broader strategic perspective regarding women empowerment in the country in general and the local sphere of government in particular.

Input from women in randomly-sampled local, district and metropolitan municipalities inclusive of rural, low-capacity and urban, high-capacity municipalities, was obtained ($n = 26$) (refer to Table 2). The municipalities were randomly selected per province (from a total number of 257 municipalities) to gain a broader geographical and demographical perspective in the respective provinces, specifically regarding issues related to culture and ethnicity. This sample is representative of all municipalities in the country and findings can thus be generalized to the total population (confidence level – 95%; confidence interval – 18.26).

Table 2. Sampled municipalities per province

Source: Adapted from the Department of Labor (2018).

Province and municipalities	No. of employees
Eastern Cape	
Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality	5,801
Dr Beyers Naude Local Municipality	338
Greater Kei Local Municipality	177
Metsimaholo Local Municipality	1,028
Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality	6,753
Sarah Baartman District Municipality	94
Free State	
Fezile Dabi District Municipality	207
Moghaka Local Municipality	1,078
Mafube Local Municipality	444
Gauteng	
City of Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality	20,377
City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality	32,916
Lesedi Local Municipality	713
Mogale City Local Municipality	2,032
Msunduzi Local Municipality	4,943
Sedibeng District Municipality	597
KwaZulu Natal	
Amajuba District Municipality	214
Dannhauser Local Municipality	174
Newcastle Local Municipality	2,896
Mpumalanga	
City of Mbombela Local Municipality	322
Dr JS Moroka Local Municipality	622
Gert Sibande District Municipality	261
Steve Tshwete Local Municipality	1,362
Western Cape	
Eden District Municipality	592
George Municipality	1,932
Hessequa Local Municipality	540
Mossel Bay Local Municipality	963

An interview schedule and questionnaire were designed and pre-tested with the respective target populations. Interviews were conducted by field workers at the offices of target group 1 and questionnaires were distributed by e-mail to target group 2. For purposes of method triangulation and to obtain 'thick' contextual and strategic descriptions regarding the gender issues, interviews were selected as data collection instrument for target group 1. Ethical considerations included voluntary participation of participants (all participants had to sign a declaration of consent to participate, and anonymity and confidentiality of responses).

Table 3. Biographical profile of female councilors (target group 1)

	Position	No. of respondents	%	Years' experience
1	Senior political role-players	37	63.8	1-5 (62.2%) 6-10 (24.1%)
2	Full-time and ward councilors	21	36.2	1-5 (37.9%) 6-10 (38%)

Table 4. Biographical profile of female officials (target group 1)

	Position	No. of respondents	%	Years' experience
1	Senior management	42	43.0	
2	Middle and junior management	52	53.0	1-5 (19.38%) 6-10 (33.67%)
3	Professionals	4	4.0	

Table 5. Biographical profile of the reference group (target group 2)

No.	Employer	Position	No. of respondents	%
1	South African Local Government Association (SALGA)	Community Development Directorate Advisor: Social Development Provincial Executive Officer General Manager: Marketing, Communication and Stakeholder Relations	4	15.38
2	Public Protector	Director Assistant Director: Communication Provincial Representative Manager: International Relations and Parliamentary Liaison	4	15.38
3	National School of Government	Director Deputy Director: Leadership Development	2	7.69
4	Department of Labor	Director	1	3.84
5	Commission for Gender Equality	Deputy Director: Research	1	3.84
6	South African Local Government Bargaining Council	Regional Secretary	1	3.84
7	University of Pretoria	Academic	1	3.84
8	Department of Higher Education and Training	Assistant Director	1	3.84
9	Local Government	Chief Specialist Manager: HRD Manager: PMU Manager: HR Manager: Service Delivery Coordination HR Development Practitioner Acting Manager: ODT	7	26.92
10	Gender Links	Head of Programs	1	3.84
11	United Nations Development Programme	Gender and HIV Program Manager	1	3.84
12	Self-employed	Independent Consultant	1	3.84
13	Gauteng Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs	Transformation Manager	1	3.84

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS: PHASE 1

4.1. Women empowerment through formal educational programs

A desktop survey revealed that most tertiary institutions in South Africa have gender programs and/or courses available at both undergraduate and graduate level. There seems to be emphasis on

inter- and multi-disciplinary teaching with gender combined with the humanities, social, natural sciences, agriculture, public health or architecture. Formal programs tend to be highly academic and theoretical in nature, while non-formal programs are more oriented towards practical issues. Since formal programs are generally bound by specific subject disciplines, they often use a multi-disciplinary approach to operationalize women empowerment learning outcomes. In all the programs surveyed, it is evident that gender is not addressed

Table 6. SAQA registered qualifications in gender and women studies

Source: SAQA (2018).

Qualification	University	Academic field	Total credits
BA: Women and Gender Studies	University of the Western Cape	Human and Social Studies: People/Human Centred Development	360
BSocSci in Gender and Women Studies	University of Cape Town	Human and Social Studies: Environmental Relations	360
Advanced Certificate in Education: Gender Education	University of Zululand	Education, Training and Development: Schooling	120
BSocSci (Hons) in Gender Studies	University of Pretoria	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	120
BA (Hons) in Gender Studies	University of Venda	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	120
BA (Hons) in Gender Studies	UNISA	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	120
BA (Hons) in Women and Gender Studies	University of the Western Cape	Human and Social Studies: People/Human Centred Development	120
BA (Hons) in Gender and Transformation	University of Cape Town	Human and Social Studies: People/Human Centred Development	120
BA (Hons) in Gender Studies	University of KwaZulu-Natal	Human and Social Studies: People/Human Centred Development	128
BSocSci (Hons) in Gender Studies	University of KwaZulu-Natal	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	128
BSocSci (Hons) in Gender Studies and Transformation	University of KwaZulu-Natal	Human and Social Studies: People/Human Centred Development	128
BSocSci (Hons) in Gender and Transformation	University of Cape Town	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	120
BSocSci (Hons) in Gender and Women Studies	University of Cape Town	Human and Social Studies: Environmental Relations	120
BTh (Hons) in Gender and Theology	University of KwaZulu-Natal	Human and Social Studies: Religious and ethical foundations of society	120
Postgraduate Diploma in Arts: Women and Gender Studies	University of the Western Cape	Human and Social Studies: People/Human Centred Development	120
Postgraduate Diploma in Gender Studies	University of Venda	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	140
Master of Nursing Science: Advanced Women's Health Nursing Science	University of Pretoria	Health Sciences and Social Services: Curative Health	320
Postgraduate Diploma in Gender Studies	University of the Free State	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	120
MA in Gender Studies	University of the Free State	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	190
MPhil in Women and Gender Studies	University of the Western Cape	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	120
Master of Physiotherapy in Women's Health	University of Pretoria	Health Sciences and Social Services: Curative Health	338
MA in Gender Studies	University of Venda	Human and Social Studies: People/Human Centred Development	180
MA in Gender and Transformation	University of Cape Town	Human and Social Studies: Environmental Relations	120
MA in Gender Studies	University of KwaZulu-Natal	Human and Social Studies: People/Human Centred Development	128
Master of Gender Studies	University of Venda	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	240
MPhil in Gender Studies Research	University of Cape Town	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	120
MPhil in Women and Gender Studies	University of the Western Cape	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	120
MSocSci in Gender Studies	University of Pretoria	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	180
MSocSci in Gender Studies	University of KwaZulu-Natal	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	128
MSocSci in Gender and Transformation	University of Cape Town	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	120
MSocSci in Gender Studies Research	University of KwaZulu-Natal	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	128
DPhil in Gender Studies	University of Venda	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	240
Ph.D. in Women and Gender Studies	University of Western Cape	Human and Social Studies: General Social Science	240

Note: The caveat is made that some of these qualifications are currently under review and the final status of the qualifications has not been confirmed.

in isolation, but is intersected with another field of study such as public health, agriculture, social upliftment, economic development, and political participation.

Consulting the South African Qualifications Authority's (SAQA) website on registered qualifications with the word gender or women in its program title produced the following results, as depicted in Table 3.

The dominant themes expressed through modules in most formal undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications relate to women's position and oppression in society due to specifically socially constructed structures such as religion, culture, politics, economics and development discourse. Since most of the qualifications fall within the broader social and human sciences, it is expected that a critical view will be taken in order to question the role and status of women and identify means through which women's realities can be changed.

4.2. Women empowerment through non-formal educational program

Apart from the above formal degree programs, a number of unit standards have been created to further gender equality and development. These unit standards are part of certificate programs registered with a variety of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) offered on lower National Qualification Framework (NQF) levels, including levels 2, 3 and 4. These levels fall within the further education and training band (FET) and certificates are mostly delivered through non-governmental organizations and private service providers.

In general, non-formal, short courses examine the manner in which gender is socialized within societies and organizations questioning cultural constructions, health, sexual behavior, ideologies, policy and regulations, as well as race, class and religion. The University of Pretoria, for example, offers a short course in Gender Mainstreaming with the aim of understanding gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve gender equality. The focus for participants of the short course would be to develop skills that would enable them to apply gender mainstreaming effectively within their organ-

izations (University of Pretoria, 2018). The Centre for Gender and Africa Studies at the Free State University offers a short learning program on conflict and peace in context, which has a learning unit that focuses on civil society, gender and religion as pertinent issues in African peace-building (University of the Free State, 2018). UNISA (2018) presents a course in African Feminist and Gender Studies with the aim of building a critical understanding of gender and development specifically in the third world through the lens of African feminists and scholars. The course aims to attract professionals from different fields, as well as members of political parties, women and gender activists, student and the youth in general. Specific topics such as the history of third world feminism, critical approaches to gendered policy planning and design and African feminism as an instrument for social change are covered in the course.

Within the public sector, the National School of Government (NSG) (2018) provides for a Gender Mainstreaming in the Public Service program, which enables learners to align gender issues with general operational processes and activities in public sector institutions. The program is offered to senior and middle managers strategically placed to mainstream gender through policies and projects in all national, provincial and local government departments. In addition to the above, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs offers a women councillor training program, which is aligned to the National Certificate: Local Government Councillor Practice (as detailed above). The program focuses specifically on building self-esteem, living assertive lives, managing fear/obligation/guilt, mastering networking and public speaking. The Department of Human Settlements has a Women and Youth Development Programme, which targets women and youth in building construction capacity that would enable them to participate in human settlement projects as contractors or sub-contractors.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also deliver a number of short courses or empowerment programs. The more active and influential NGOs and their programs include:

- Sonke Gender Justice, focusing on gender equality, gender-based violence, and the re-

duction of the spread of HIV and the impact of AIDS;

- Gender Links, focusing on equality and justice for women and men in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region;
- Women’s Net, focusing on gender equality and justice through training by utilizing information and communication technologies (ICTs); and
- Soul City Institute for Social Justice, focusing on capacity strengthening and training programs, especially in the health sector.

As stated, non-formal programs have a more vocational focus. Empowerment is a central theme in these programs and the importance of local participation and mobilisation is apparent. An analysis of the content of these programs and courses revealed the following key competency themes:

- voice and visibility e.g. participation in government decision-making;
- cultural constructions of gender, including feminist theory and gender activism;
- policies related to gender equality and labour equity;
- women’s role in societal leadership and governance;
- self-management;
- specific competencies in the fields of health, domestic violence, agriculture, financial concerns, and personal mastery;
- peace and relationship building; and
- social support structures and networking.

To design a comprehensive competency framework to support women’s empowerment within the local sphere of government, attention should thus be given to building competencies that underpin these themes.

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS: PHASE 2

The findings below reflect the responses obtained from participants of target group 1 (i.e. women in political and managerial positions). This will be followed by responses obtained from respondents from target group 2.

Table 7. Q1: Are you aware of any specific targeted development programs aimed at women?

Response	Value	No. of respondents	%
Yes	1	25	43.10
No	2	33	56.89
Total respondents		58	100

Table 8. Q1.1: If Yes, what is the nature of these programs – what do they aim to achieve?

No.	Responses	No. of respondents	%
1	Not applicable	32	55.1
2	Capacity building; women development; empowerment	7	12.0
3	Leadership development	5	8.6
4	Entrepreneurship	5	8.6
5	Self-management	2	3.4
6	Conflict management	1	1.7
7	Financial management	1	1.7
8	Computer literacy	1	1.7
9	Women in construction	1	1.7
10	Agricultural programs	1	1.7
11	Social development	1	1.7

The main critique raised against gaining access to and the content of these women-based programs and courses is as follows:

- women are not made aware of such programs (54%);
- no opportunity to women is given due to the lack of interest by senior officials (23.4%);
- municipal and personal financial constraints (14.2%);
- time constraints (difficulty to balance household and work responsibilities) (10.4%);

- content of the programs is more aimed at national government; it does not address particular local conditions and experiences (8.6%).

It should be noted, however, that 56.12% of councillors and 74.13% of officials indicated that they regularly receive training to improve their administrative and managerial functioning. This is confirmed when women in political and managerial positions were asked to rate their personal capacity and managerial competency to perform their responsibilities. Fifty-five percent rated their capacity and competency as ‘good’ and ‘average’ (24.13%). These programs are, however, aimed at job-specific competencies and do not address women empowerment concerns in particular.

When asked about the content of these training and development programs, the responses are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Q1.2. What is the nature of the content of these training and development programs?

No.	Responses	No. of respondents	%
1	SALGA and other programs: Councillors training; municipal minimum competency	24	41.3
2	Leadership	9	15.5
3	Public management	7	12.0
4	Business management; economic development	5	8.6
5	Financial management	2	3.4
6	Strategic planning	1	1.7
7	Municipal service delivery	1	1.7
8	Human settlement management	1	1.7
9	Social development	1	1.7
10	Water management	1	1.7
11	Marketing	1	1.7
12	Monitoring and evaluation	1	1.7
13	Computer literacy	1	1.7
14	Women in agriculture	1	1.7

The diversity of responses is indicative of the particular functional responsibilities the participants have. In other words, officials in the financial field indicated that they require financial competencies and in general did not identify competencies outside their functional domains.

Table 10. Q2. What would you suggest should receive particular attention in the design of a women empowerment program in local government? What do you think requires further attention or improvement? (target group 1)?

No.	Responses	No. of respondents	%
1	Train and develop women, including those occupying positions previously occupied by men	43	43.8
2	Develop and apply skills development and education programs for women	25	43.1
3	Enforcement of employment equity policies	17	17.3
4	Training: self-management	16	16.3
5	Establish support structures for women	14	14.2
6	Improve communication; make women aware of their rights; supply information regarding existing training programs	13	13.2
7	Establish support groups and programs for women	7	12.0
8	Training: Business skills and administration; economic development	7	12.0
9	Leadership	6	10.3
10	Self-management	6	10.3
11	Financial management	5	8.6
12	Public management	5	8.6
13	Align skills development plan and employment equity plan	7	7.1
14	Human resource management	4	6.8
15	Project management	3	5.1
16	Improve women’s political participation	2	3.4
17	Engage various stakeholders and include women from other sectors in programs	2	3.4
18	Decision making	2	3.4
19	Involve both genders in designing and implementing new strategies based on practicality and quality	2	3.4
20	Educate community regarding gender equality	1	1.7
21	Exclude political interference with appointments	1	1.7
22	Awaken council to roles and responsibilities	1	1.7
23	Problem solving	1	1.7
24	Computer literacy	1	1.7
25	Legal aspects concerning local government	1	1.7

This question was also posed to target group 2 to cross-reference the input obtained from target group 1. Their responses are listed in Table 11.

Table 11. Q3. What would you suggest should receive particular attention in the design of a women empowerment program in local government? What do you think requires further attention or improvement? (Target group 2)

No.	Responses	No. of respondents	%
1	Develop and implement capacity building, education, competency and skills development programs for women	11	42.30
2	Enforce acts and policies dealing with employment equity; equal benefits for equal work	8	30.76
3	Better mentoring and coaching for women appointed in senior management positions needed	6	23.07
4	Training: leadership	5	19.23
5	Training: self-management	5	19.23
6	Capacitate individuals to develop, implement, manage and evaluate programs aimed at empowering women; women must be involved; a national strategy for all sectors	5	19.23
7	Develop and implement structures to support women, in particular regarding household responsibilities; women forums	4	15.38
8	Education in gender equality needed	4	15.38
9	Remove prejudice	3	11.53
10	Provide childcare facilities at the workplace	3	11.53
11	Training: communication; language proficiency; public speaking	3	11.53
12	Educate policy makers on gender issues; educate men in dealing with employment equity practices	3	11.53
13	Training: use of technology to gain and provide information	2	7.69
14	Employ flexi hours and provide wi-fi to allow women to work from home	2	7.69
15	Training and development programs should be credit bearing and give access to studies for a degree or diploma	2	7.69
16	More focus on talent management and succession planning needed	2	7.69
17	Training: public management	1	3.84
18	Training: financial management	1	3.84
19	Provide councillors with education, knowledge and skills	1	3.84
20	Align recruitment policies and women empowerment programs	1	3.84
21	Appoint women with integrity in leadership positions	1	3.84

It is interesting to note the similarities in responses between target group 1 and 2. Both strongly emphasized the need to develop specifically-focused gender-based competency programs and to more

effectively enforce the gender-based policies. The latter include the mentoring and coaching of women appointed in senior political and managerial positions. Target group 1 in this regard emphasized the establishment of support structures in municipalities to assist women in senior positions.

6. RESEARCH FINDINGS: PHASE 3

Responses obtained from the interviews and questionnaires highlight numerous practices that may lead to high, average or poor performance of female councillors and officials. To address this state of affairs, it is necessary to construct a competency framework for the empowerment of women in local government. Such a competency framework could form the basis of a national women empowerment program and should be aligned with the career progression of municipal employees.

At the early career level, municipal employees are typically appointed within a specific support function. This level can be described in terms of skill level II (discretionary skill level) of the TASK job evaluation system, which stipulates that learning periods for this type of post as 'months' in order to obtain knowledge of job-specific responsibilities. At a mid career level, the local government professional is typically a 'generalist' or a senior specialist who manages municipal programs and projects. The mid career level can be described in terms of skill level III (specialized skill level) of the TASK job evaluation system, which stipulates the learning period as years in order to gain knowledge of systems. At a senior career level, the local government professional is regarded as a highly experienced generalist or specialist and holds a formal title such as manager, director or principal. The senior career level can be described in terms of skill level IV (tactical skill level) of the TASK job evaluation system, which stipulates that knowledge is required for the tactical implementation of strategic decisions within a discipline by conceptualizing future requirements and by advising and managing resources. At an executive career level, the local government professional is regarded as an organizational leader and designer of human capital. The executive career level can be described in terms of skill level V (strategic skill level) of the

Table 12. Example of key development areas and related topics per area

Fundamental personal development	Core interpersonal development	Elective organizational development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a personal strategic plan • Emotional intelligence in female leadership – guide to life: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - self-awareness; - self-regulation; - motivation; - empathy; - social skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning to lead: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - defining leadership; - theories of leadership; - styles of leadership; - developing specific leadership styles; - the importance of ethics in leadership • Leadership skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introduction to skills for leadership; - getting organized; - delegation skills; - giving and receiving feedback; - motivating others and motivation from a more senior position; - strategic thinking, creativity and innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical practice and accountability • Communication • Relationship management and building organizational community • Consultation and innovation • Leadership and strategic orientation • Planning, performance and risk management • Cultural effectiveness and process management • Entrepreneurial expertise

TASK job evaluation system, which stipulates that knowledge is required in order to understand the organization, as well as the interaction between major disciplines. The executive career level professionals are appointed based on the stipulations contained in Section 56 of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 and consist of the municipal manager and heads of department.

As stated earlier, competencies refer to the knowledge, skills and behavior that promote organizational excellence. The competency framework should thus outline various competencies, which can be grouped into three areas of development or clusters: fundamental, core and elective. The clusters and related competencies are intended to be discrete and cumulative, with each cluster building on the previous cluster, i.e. first the fundamental cluster, followed by the core cluster and finally the elective cluster (refer to Table 12).

Research has shown that the need for development at the personal and interpersonal levels is essential for empowering women, emphasizing the critical need for self-leadership, emotional intelligence and social skills such as leadership and motivation. Therefore, the fundamental and core areas of development should be compulsory for all candidates who enrol for a women empowerment program. The elective area of development is different from the above arrangement by allowing candidates two possible options:

- option one: selection of topics relevant to work environment and need for growth and development.

- option two: selection of the appropriate level of development (early level, junior level, senior level or executive level).

Candidates who have successfully completed the fundamental and core areas of development may undergo an assessment process in order to select the most appropriate option for entering the elective area of development. The program may incorporate pre-reading, contact sessions including group discussions, case studies, activities and formative assessments, presentations, workplace projects and Final Integrated Summative Assessments (FISA) for each area of development (fundamental, core and elective) in the form of Portfolio of Evidence (POE).

In order to effectively develop female leaders, the competency framework should be aligned with personal (i.e. fundamental development area), interpersonal (i.e. core development area), and organizational levels (i.e. elective development area). These development areas are all interrelated and interdependent. Within these areas of development, twelve themes (topics) became apparent:

- at the personal level:
 - 1) development of a personal strategic plan;
 - 2) emotional intelligence in leadership;
- at the interpersonal level:
 - 3) learning to lead;
 - 4) leadership skills;

- at the institutional level:
- 5) ethical practice and accountability;
- 6) communication;
- 7) relationship management and building organizational community;
- 8) consultation and innovation;
- 9) leadership and strategic orientation;
- 10) planning, performance and risk management;
- 11) cultural effectiveness and process management; and
- 12) entrepreneurial expertise.

It is recommended that the program rollout takes place over a period of 24 months and the duration per area of development should be as follows:

- fundamental area of development: 3 months;
- core area of development: 3 months;
- elective area of development: 18 months.

Figure 1 reflects the proposed design and layout of the competency framework for women empowerment.

Source: Authors' own.

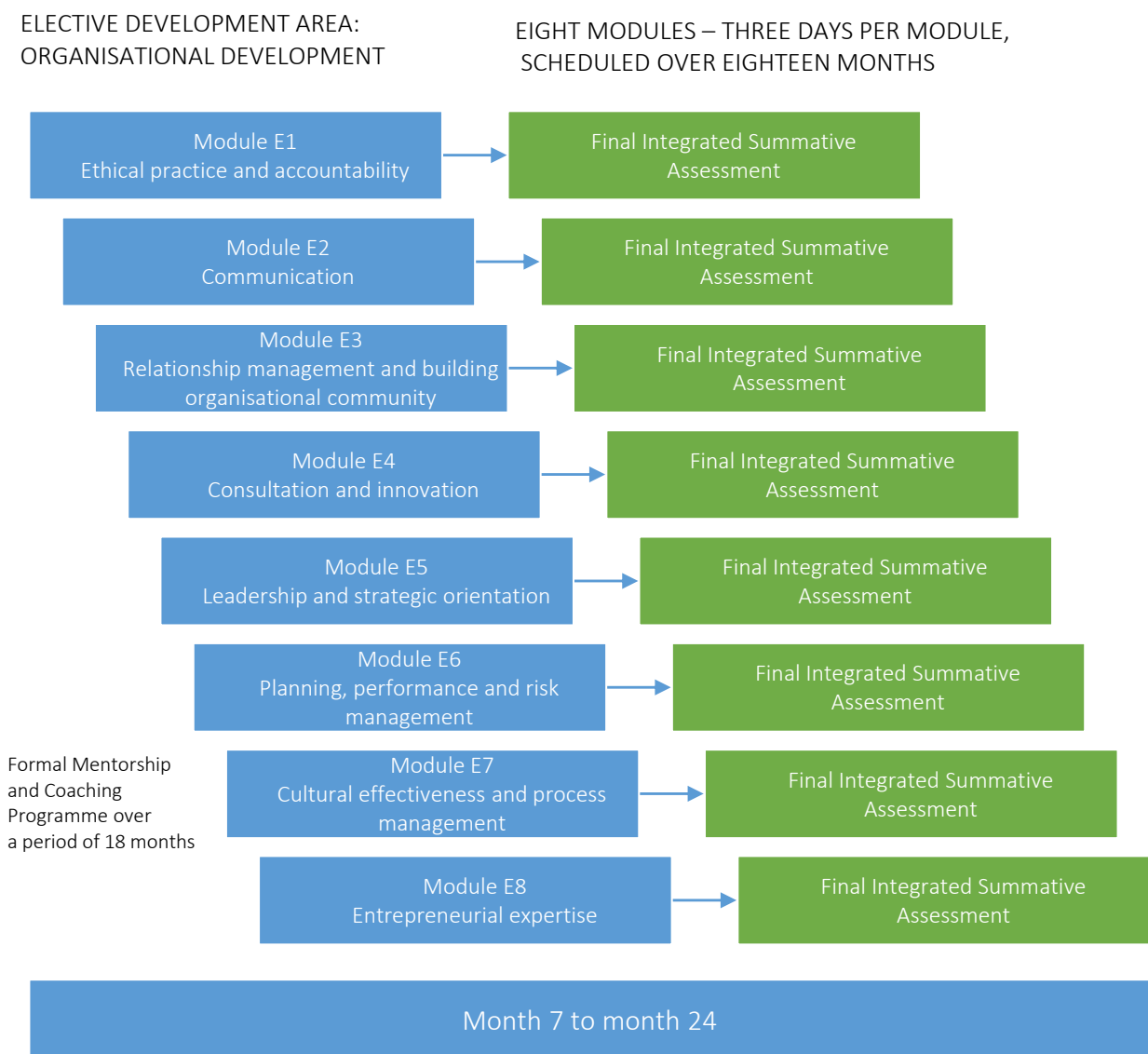


Figure 1. Competency framework design and layout: women empowerment program

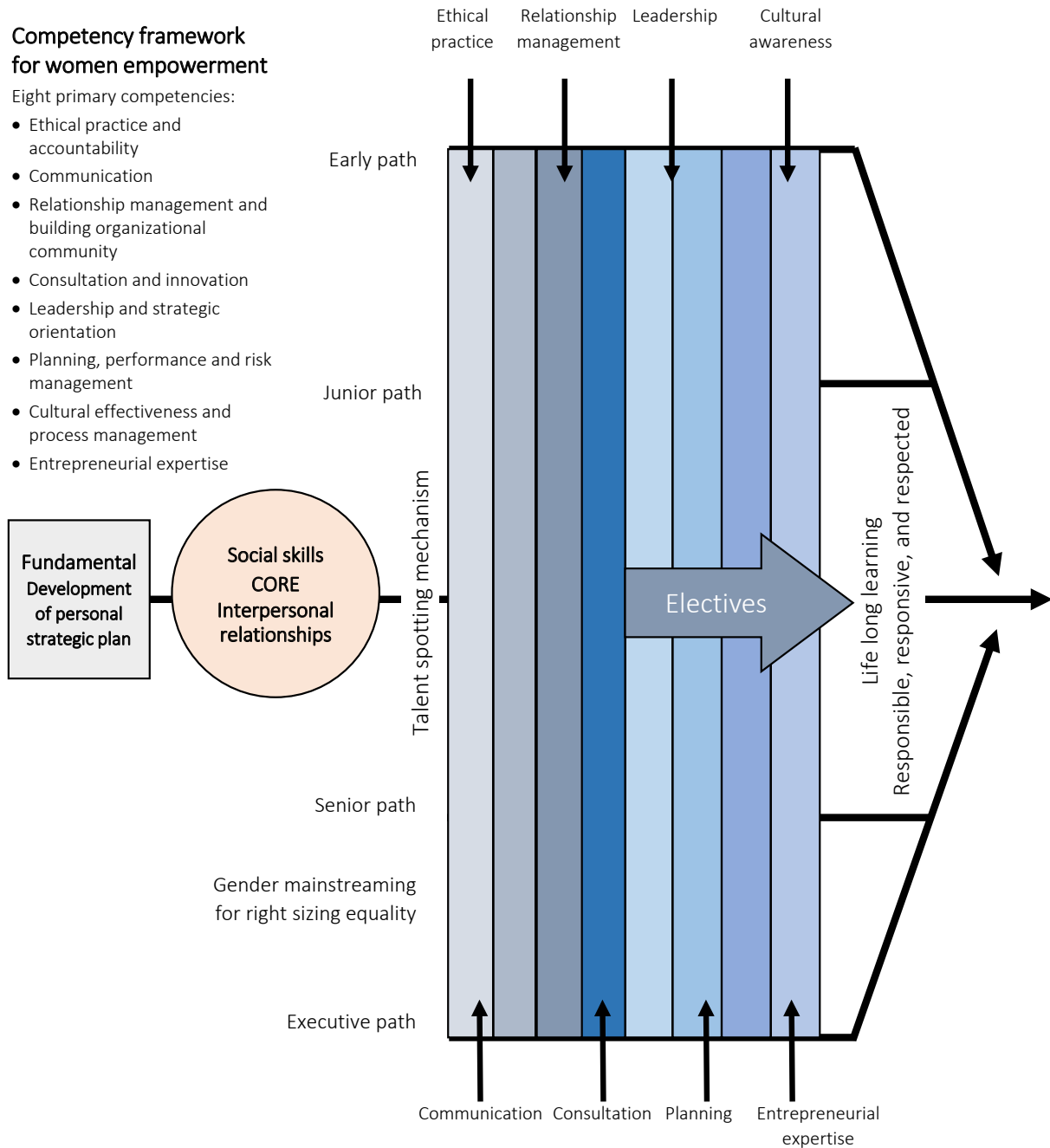


Figure 2. Competency framework for women empowerment

Figure 2 reflects the proposed competency framework for women empowerment in local government. This framework should be populated by the respective competencies highlighted by the desktop survey of existing gender-based formal and non-formal programs, as well as the competencies identified by target groups 1 and 2 in the empirical investigation.

This competency framework should further be supported by key organizational enablers for women empowerment, including conducive organizational culture, structural empowerment, psychological empowerment, and financial and other resource allocation.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS: THE DESIGN AND ROLLOUT OF A COMPETENCY PROGRAM AIMED AT WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The successful design and rollout of the competency program for women empowerment is dependent on a number of critical success factors. It is thus recommended that the following key requirements should be met:

- the curriculum of the women empowerment program should be aligned with skills the female councillor or official really needs. This means that the curriculum should include generic, as well as job-specific competencies;
- the competency program should have a sound pedagogical framework uniquely designed for women. Women indicated that their general exclusion from social and official networks and the inability to share experiences in competency development with other women are major hindrances to their personal growth;
- competencies should be developed through learning experiences and expanded responsibilities;
- exposure of women to exceptional role models and mentors through behavioral modeling is essential to develop their potential and to promote their careers. Hearing other women reflect on their personal experiences could enable them to review their own obstacles and to pinpoint areas for personal development. When women have the opportunity to engage other women, it usually improves their leadership skills and organizational knowledge. Such collaboration also generally augments self-esteem, leading to women more likely pursuing leadership positions;
- the use of integrated learning strategies and instruments, such as networking, leadership development programs, and on-the-job training may facilitate behavioral change. A multidimensional approach is thus required to improve work performance, foster dedication and commitment to operationalize organizational objectives, and to be creative and innovative;
- outcomes from traditional leadership programs have illuminated the negative consequences of expecting or encouraging women to display perceived traditional male leadership behavior. Research has shown that delivering a program identical to one designed for men, or where women are trained to emulate typical male leadership behavior, is counterproductive. It can also be argued that such learning strategy will not do justice to the unique leadership approach and behavior of women.

CONCLUSION

Women empowerment requires that gender perspectives be considered an integral part of all activities across all municipal functional domains and programs. Women empowerment programs are usually successful when implemented in organizational settings characterized by management support, teamwork, creative thinking, and openness. Gender-specific initiatives can create space for the empowerment of women and can act as an important incubator for differentiated ideas and strategies. The empowerment of women should furthermore foster self-control, self-esteem, awareness raising, self-confidence, the expansion of choices, and increased access to development and growth opportunities. Only then could a real difference be made to address gender discrimination and inequality in society.

Derived from extensive research, important considerations for the design of a curriculum for a women empowerment program were highlighted. This program should include multiple topics that strike a balance between theoretical understanding of gender in organizations and society, as well as more

practical, skills-based approach to empowerment. It is envisaged that the implementation of the recommended women empowerment program will make a significant contribution to mainstream gender issues and to development women in political and administrative leadership positions in the local sphere of government.

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