

EXPLORING BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN KWAZULU-NATAL: A PUBLIC POLICY PERSPECTIVE USING AN ADAPTED 5C ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK IN IMPENDLE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article to presents a narrative review of the literature on women's empowerment in the national, provincial and local public administration. Since the advent of democracy, South Africa's public administration has been governed by a transformative system defined by constitutional principles, a legal framework and public policies, promising effective governance and service delivery for over three decades. Despite the existence of national gender equality policies, KwaZulu-Natal has been singled out for the underrepresentation of women in leadership and key strategic decision-making roles. The province is predominantly rural, where patriarchal culture continues to shape academia, society, the workplace and political institutions. The findings indicate underrepresentation of women in policy planning roles, where women were represented, their voices were systemically silenced or relegated to support roles. These findings highlight the public administration's inability to implement broader gender equality policies, such as Sustainable Development Goal 5, which aims to empower women and girls and accomplish gender equality. This paper acknowledges that deeply entrenched culture cannot be dismantled from a top-down approach and proposes a re-engineering of the public sector at the local level of governance, where service delivery and community engagement occur, and an expectation of 50% gender parity quotas is needed in accordance with the National Framework for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Policy. The article offers insights for policymakers in the province on how behavioural and systemic drivers, such as confidence in government institutions and perceived policy relevance, influence the success of women empowerment initiatives.

Keywords: Gender equality, Patriarchy, Public policy, Women empowerment



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1. INTRODUCTION

Public administration has faced the women empowerment conundrum for 30 years in South Africa. Nzwei and Sikhosana (2020) attributed this to the politi-

cal dynamics of the pre-democratic dispensation, where black people, in general, and women in particular, were relegated to the periphery of economic, social, and political power. The United Nations-Women (2018) reported that some countries lacked adequate gender public policy frameworks and laws to protect women's rights from insensitive traditional norms and all forms of gender-based violence (GBV). Ramoroka et al. (2025) note that this systemic shift aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UNSDGs) 5, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. However, they point out that South Africa lacks an overarching legislative framework that compels enforceable action in respect of gender equality, as prescribed by SDG 5 (Ramoroka et al., 2025). The UN-Women's statement was not supported by a country list, which prompted the present study's analysis of pro-women policies and legislative framework in South Africa and KwaZulu-Natal (KZN).

The empirical evidence for gender equality statistics in KZN is limited; however, available data from Stats SA (2023) indicate consistent gender gaps, with women facing higher unemployment rates and lower participation in leadership roles. Specifically, only 33.1% of councillors and 39% of those in senior-level positions at the local and district municipalities. This article attempts to answer a question on what extent does the National Policy Framework for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality reflect an actionable commitment to women's empowerment at the local governance level. This study employed a conceptual framework that provided a broader lens of interpretation. The 5C (content, context, commitment, capacity and clients) Protocol is a framework used in policy implementation studies to identify and analyse the key factors that influence whether a policy is successfully implemented. It's beneficial for diagnosing why implementation gaps occur between policy design and practice (Nhemachena, Jonas & Karuaihe, 2015).

However, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 explicitly addresses gender equality and women's empowerment under Chapter 3 of the Bill of Rights, which promotes equal representation and empowerment. It gives effect to section 9 of the Constitution to establish a legislative framework for the empowerment of women, to align all aspects of laws and implementation of laws relating to women empowerment, and the appointment and representation of women in decision-making positions and structures; and to provide for matters connected therewith (the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996). Other international and national policy gender frameworks include UN-Women (2024), the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, the Broad-based Economic Empowerment Act 53 of 2003, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000, and the White Paper on Affirmative Action Policy in the Public Service, 1999 (WPAAP) (Hanyane & Ahiane, 2022). In addition, there is the South African National Framework for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WE-GEP) (2000), which stipulates that South Africa sought to be reengineered to the equitable realisation of all rights and freedoms by everyone, and advocate for

equity, particularly equal rights for women in respect of social, political, and economic power representation in positions of authority and systems of governance.

This article recognises that misalignment between universal development goals and national policies impedes progress toward gender equality and sustainable development. This is evidenced by hotly contested debates on women empowerment in academia, religion and politics. The discussion on National Women's Day: Working together to enhance women's economic empowerment through skills development and sustainable job creation (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2011). This study examines how these dynamics impact efforts to empower women in the public sector by presenting a narrative review of the literature women empowerment and gender equality in iMpendle Local Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal. The article begins by reviewing literature on women's roles in public administration, the extent to which their voices are included in policy planning and development, and the representation of women in key strategic roles at the national, provincial and local levels. Finally, it recommends re-engineering strategies based on the 5C protocol (Content, Context, Commitment, Capacity, and Clients) for women empowerment to highlight the shortfalls of gendered policy implementation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in feminist theory, which provides a critical lens for examining structural and cultural barriers that inhibit women's roles in key strategic decision-making in public administration. MacKinnon (1989), a notable advocate for feminism, conceptualised it as a theoretical commitment to women's liberation movements, as it has traditionally been associated with the women's emancipation movement, which dates to the 1890s. According to Andermahr (1997), feminist theory is founded on the idea that the exclusion of women from positions of leadership and power, as well as the discriminatory restrictions that come with cultural uniformity, are the result of male power to manipulate information, religion, tradition, legislation, and the workplace. Ferber and Nelson (2009) supported this argument by stating that gender bias is a byproduct of men taking their responsibilities more seriously and limiting or denying female roles throughout their lives. In an earlier study, Hooks (2000) referred to this noble cause as "just" to advocate for and promote women's rights on the grounds of gender equality. In the context of KZN, a predominantly rural province where traditional authority and conservative gender norms remain influential, feminist theory is relevant in uncovering how gendered power relations are embedded within state institutions.

2.2 Gender imbalances at a local government level

Despite the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 and na-

tional policy frameworks on gender equality and women empowerment, women remain underrepresented in strategic key roles within public administration at all levels of governance. The Commission for Gender Equality (2025) revealed that women's representation in the National Assembly declined from 46% to 43%. According to Mkhize et al. (2025), women comprise 63% of the public sector workforce, while only 45.2% occupy senior management positions. Coopoo (2021) reported that, during the 2021 local government elections, women made up only 37% of all elected councillors nationally. A study by Khonjelwayo (2023) addressed the underrepresentation of women in key strategic roles in public administration. The findings indicated that women were marginalised in leadership roles at all levels of governance, but the issue was particularly pronounced at the municipal level, in rural areas such as iMpendle Local Municipality, where implementation of women empowerment policies misaligns and is inconsistent with SDG5.

The debate on women empowerment can be summarised into two dominant narratives: on the one hand, the national government prides itself on its commitments and efforts to achieve SDG5 and WEGEP directives, and on the other, there is the growing public outcry of women trapped in the system of patriarchy (Bulmer, 2022). Faugoo (2024) describes this as a disjuncture between policy directives and their implementation, as well as the policy and lived experiences. Therefore, the debate is not simply about whether gender equality frameworks exist, but about their implementation and impact in disrupting patriarchal power relations in political institutions.

Patriarchy pervades all aspects of society, including politics, economics, social structures, and cultural norms. Facio (2013: 2) defines patriarchy as "a form of mental, social, spiritual, economic and political organisation/structuring of society produced by the gradual institutionalisation of sex-based political relations created, maintained and reinforced by different institutions linked closely together to achieve consensus on the lesser value of women and their roles. These institutions interconnect not only with each other to strengthen the structures of domination of men over women, but also with other systems of exclusion, oppression and/or domination based on real or perceived differences between humans, creating States that respond only to the needs and interests of a few powerful men". KZN is a predominantly rural province where traditional authority structures and deeply entrenched patriarchal normative systems shape gender relations across all spheres of life (Manqe, 2017; Commission for Gender Equality, 2024; Ngcobo et al., 2025). The persistence of patriarchal systems not only undermines the implementation of gender equity policies at the provincial level but also restricts women's participation in key strategic roles at local municipalities, particularly in rural areas. Drawing on Focia's definition, patriarchy can be understood as a network of power relations that fosters internalised and externalised conditions to limit women to support roles in decision-making structures.

iMpendle Local Municipality was selected for its rural context, limited economic opportunities, historical past injustices where patriarchy is deeply entrenched in many social aspects and institutionalised as a regular practice (Fhlatharta & Farrell, 2017). Despite national commitments to gender equality and the presence of legislative frameworks such as the WEGEP, the municipality continues to face challenges in translating these policies into substantive outcomes for women at the local level. Khosla and Masaud (2012) suggested that gender equality should be studied at the local government level, as men tend to dominate, and women are not given the same opportunities or status. Maziwisa (2022:3) reported a 4.1% decrease in the overall representation of women in local councils since 2021. Women's representation in ward seats decreased from 33% in 2016 to 12.7% in 2021, while women's representation in parliamentary seats drastically decreased from 48% in 2016 to 24.2% in 2021. Hossain (2015) stated that women empowerment has been the most pervasive theme in local government development. Shah, Aziz & Ahmad (2015) argued that unless women are involved in the decision-making and policymaking process at all levels of the local government sphere, changes in women's political and, to some extent, social and economic status will continue to be marginal.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This article presents a narrative review of the literature on women's empowerment in KZN's public administration, with particular focus on iMpendle Local Municipality. The review is drawn from a broader qualitative thesis study designed to explore and synthesise existing scholarly discussions, thematic patterns, and research gaps on the implementation of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, WEGEP and broader policy actions such as SDG5. Byrne (2016) explains that a narrative review methodology is deemed fit due to its flexibility in capturing conceptual insights, historical developments, and socio-political contexts, particularly relevant when dealing with gendered experiences in bureaucratic systems.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion of the results is presented below as follows:

4.1 Women Empowerment in South Africa

Women empowerment has been a much-debated concept in the South African academic, political, and governance landscape. Mavundla (2019) revealed that the South African national government's goal was to achieve a 50:50 gender parity in top leadership by March 2009, underscoring the importance of gender equality to public policy. Khonjelwayo & Zondi (2025) reported that this objective remains far from being accomplished, and the March 2009 target date for gender parity at the senior management level was significant-

ly missed. Additionally, the issue is not specific to municipal government but is widespread throughout all levels and spheres of governance. Majola (2021) stated that the question of women in public administration was first addressed in 1976, with the main agenda focusing on three key themes: discrimination against, underrepresentation of, and underutilisation of women in the public service. To improve the empowerment of women and promote gender equality, the government has enacted various legislative and policy frameworks that strive to recognise gender equity in the quest for nation-building (Bobek, Schachl & Horvat, 2023). According to Ranganathan et al. (2021), the effective use of resources available to public officeholders is the primary goal of public administration. Similarly, Shale (2013) stated in an earlier study that effective administration should strive to eliminate any form of waste inconsistent with the welfare of the people. As Parvin (2023) states, the entry of a small group of women into the workforce affects gender equity quotas and operations.

Shaban, Shaha and Naeem (2014) stated that emancipating women in South Africa remains a top priority and a pillar of the country's future freedom, democracy and prosperity. The need to combat institutional inequality, discrimination, bigotry, subjugation of women and gendered mistreatment is at the core of contemporary society's reform plan. At the same time, the public sector must foster an environment that encourages people to engage equally and fully in all facets of the nation's development. Sunny (2014) reported that male applicants receive preference over female applicants even when they have a similar background. Bexell (2012) concluded that because of male dominance, patriarchal dominance, and women's oppression have been the key reasons why women have less interest in international assignments, even if they bring higher salaries. According to Hicks and Buccus (2012), the manifestos of South African political parties in 2009 did not adequately advance gender equality, mainstream gender issues, or advance women's status. There was a limited focus on advancing gender equality and the participation of women in leadership positions. Some political parties did not address gender at all in their manifestos, while others did so in an ambiguous manner. Finally, Nzewi and Sikhosana (2020) concluded that women's participation is widely regarded as a cornerstone for achieving gender equality. Khonjelwayo and Zondi (2025) counterargued that after an in-depth exploration of women representation quotas in local government in KZN, women in local government still have limited participation in decision-making in general and key strategic roles, in particular and local municipalities, such as iMpendle have not met the 50% gender equity quotas.

4.2 A South African Political Review of Women Empowerment

The juncture becomes evident in the inconsistencies and misalignment of implementing SDG5 directives at the local, provincial and national government levels. Vyas-Doorgapersad & Shava (2022) argued that while the South

African government has made constitutional and legislative commitments to gender equality under the Constitution and National Policy Framework for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGEP), women's underrepresentation in political decision-making structures persists due to weak political will, internal party dynamics, and patriarchal attitudes embedded in both political and administrative institutions. Twalo (2024) supports this claim by pointing out that political parties promote gender equity during election manifestos; however, their commitment rarely translates into tangible, transformative policy reforms, especially in provinces such as KZN. Orisadare (2019) counter-argued that women's empowerment in political parties is a key development strategy, as research shows that the success of getting women into government is primarily attributed to the implementation of gender quotas. Kerevel (2019) disagrees by arguing that political parties use a quota system as a deliberate attempt to make electoral gains among women voters while promoting the selection of women who will not challenge the patriarchal status quo.

These perspectives suggest that the lack of correlation between political intent and policy action reinforces a patriarchal system, where public administration underscores gendered power dynamics. Olaitan (2024) emphasised that descriptive representation of women occupying seats in parliament or local councils has not guaranteed substantive empowerment unless supported by feminist leadership coalitions and institutional capacity. From this perspective, public administration is shaped by the political will in which it operates, perpetuating gender inequality.

As of the 1990s, South Africa laid the groundwork for political efforts to advance women in politics by ratifying many major international conventions and regional instruments on gender equality (Darhour & Dahlerup, 2020). According to Harjanto and Ramadhan (2019), the role of politics and political parties in women's empowerment involves a programme of action that aims to promote women's participation in decision-making and leadership positions, as well as protect women's human rights. Okedele, Kang and Greenlee (2025) state that the political advancement of measures for achieving gender equality in the power structure and its equivalent was one of the thirteen objectives expressed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 1995. Park (2022) notes that three decades after the dawn of democracy and the promulgation of the South African constitution, women are still not given a prominent position in politics and governance. He calls for a critical evaluation and analysis of women's political participation through the political structures that perpetuate gender inequality in public and private spheres. The phenomenon of women's political participation is a significant issue in South Africa, as it is in Rwanda, Sweden, and New Zealand, amongst others (UN Women, 2024). Prodip (2022) advocates that women's political participation must be a worldwide programme with an international agenda. Pandey, Singh and Unni (2020) view that women's empowerment in the political arena remains seriously under-

represented in decision-making positions, a view that remains relevant today.

4.3 The Local Government's Role in Gender-Equality Policy

As stated, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 mandates local spheres of government to protect women and girls from insensitive traditional norms, which have explicitly excluded women from actively participating in key strategic leadership roles (Mpfu, 2021). The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, the Broad-based Economic Empowerment Act 53 of 2003, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000, the White Paper on Affirmative Action Policy in the Public Service, 1999 (WPAAP), and the South African National Framework for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (2000), are some of the gender-equality frameworks promulgated to guide local government in the protection of women's human rights and their equal leadership participation to ensure a representative governance (Hanyane & Ahiante, 2022). The South African Local Government Authority (SALGA) (2021) observed that since the implementation of these statutory, regulatory and policy frameworks, women have seen improvement in their participation and representation in senior public management echelons in the local sphere of government. Adams (2025) argues that, although many women were appointed to the local sphere of government, underrepresentation persists at both senior and middle-management levels. For example, since the 2021 local elections, only 37% of councillors are women, which Matotoka and Odeku (2021) highlighted as an urgent need to address the barriers to entry for women and reverse gains to achieve the 50/50 representation as envisioned in the Bill of Rights. Ndlovu (2022) agreed that while the agenda for the elections was to dethrone the leading party, politics had not centred women as part of transformative development, despite women representing the highest number of voters than men.

The underrepresentation of women in senior structures and key roles in the local government sphere is generally linked to patriarchal attitudes and practices. Buthezi, Cele, Nxumalo, Zondo, and Zondi (2024) explained that patriarchy exists within households and societies, and it permeates most public workplaces. In a study by the SALGA, one respondent reported that as a council speaker, in a male-dominated environment, her opinion was often overlooked and overshadowed by patriarchal attitudes. The findings suggest that this behaviour suppresses female managers' self-confidence and deprives them of their feminine skills (Maluleke and Maluleke, 2024). Ndlovu (2022) argued that patriarchy has not been achieved across the South African public sectors, is responsible for the limited allocation of decision-making powers to women, the silencing of women leaders, and unnecessary questioning of female public managers' work performances.

4.4 A Provincial Perspective on Women Empowerment

During the pre-democratic era, women were treated as subjects rather than citizens. It was only after the national government adopted democracy that women, mainly black women, were recognised as citizens (Segalo, 2015). However, feminist scholarship argues that prejudice against women still exists, as evidenced in the lack of pro-women empowerment policy action (Khonjelwayo & Zondi, 2025). Jabeen and Iqbal (2020) state that women empowerment should be based on a regulatory framework for gender equality and women empowerment at the provincial and local government levels. They expounded that empowering women involves full autonomy over their lives, self-awareness, confidence, complete expansion of choices, full access to and control over resources, as well as policy actions to transform the structures and institutions which reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality (Jabeen & Iqbal, 2020).

The KwaZulu-Natal provincial government has adopted women empowerment and equity programmes, namely the Women Economic Empowerment Directorate, the Women Advancement Fund, the Women in Business Outreach Programme, and the Women Economic Assembly (WECONA) (South African Government News Agency, 2023). Following a review of available literature and official sources, no publicly accessible provincial policy document specific to women's empowerment in KZN could be identified. The provincial government's role is limited to the implementation of programmes and initiatives, specifically dedicated to socio-economic development, rather than women's role in key strategic planning and decision-making. Hicks and Buccus (2012) revealed that local municipalities have Integrated Development Plans (IDPs); however, none of these plans incorporated gender equality or women's empowerment, gender mainstreaming in service delivery planning, the National Gender Policy Framework, the Gender Policy Framework for Local Government, or any other municipal gender policy. This gap has been identified as a contributing factor to a lack of structural reform in public administration. Sikhosana (2020) supports this view by stating that women in local authorities are crucial for reforming municipal authorities and incorporating gender analysis into planning and system performance. In an earlier study, Shaban, Shaha and Naeem (2014) considered women empowerment as a robust strategy to achieve development priorities. Additionally, Ahmad and Bano (2019) explain that women empowerment as a strategy promotes well-being of life associated with the process and outcome, which attempts to achieve a relative degree of ability to make an influence in the world as well as the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where the ability was previously denied to them.

Conversely, Hicks and Buccus (2012) point out that women's representation and engagement in political parties, which gave access to employment in public administration, were often criticised. Politics is a male-dominated sector, and women's voices were excluded and overlooked as a misfit (Moyo & Muchabaiwa, 2024). Pini, Moletsane, and Mills (2013) attributed the sector's design

to the provincial and local governments' lack of awareness or adherence to the WEGEP or SDG5. The authors acknowledged that only a few provinces understand the importance of integrating gender into the creation, execution, monitoring, and assessment of their programmes (Pini et al., 2013). For example, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) launched a women empowerment portfolio in 2010 to transition the voice of women from the periphery to the centre. However, the programme has not been successful in reforming all municipalities (SALGA, 2021). McGing and Cullen (2024) argued that there are not enough women in elected office to bring about the changes necessary to improve their economic and social standing. However, it should be evident that there cannot be a significant governmental or societal commitment to empowering women without equitable representation.

4.5 An Adapted 5C Protocol to Review the iMpendle Local Municipality

Khonjelwayo and Zondi (2025) argued that these policies often lack local contextualisation, which has made them difficult to operationalise at the municipal level. In terms of context, in which these policies are implemented, such as iMpendle's traditional norms (leadership of chiefs and tribunals), cultural norms (women are raised to be homemakers), and social norms (women are taught submission from a young age), are embedded patriarchal conditioning, which creates an internalised system of patriarchy. In terms of commitment, the local municipality does not effectively prioritise women empowerment or gender parity in its administration. There exists an Impendle Economic Revitalisation Project, which supports female-owned enterprises to promote women's socioeconomic development. However, the project has been constrained by budgetary constraints, gender norms and weak implementation (Umgungundlovu Economic Development Agency, 2018). Scholars such as Shabalala (2018), Miya, Chipungu and Magidimisha (2020), and Khonjelwayo (2023) reported that women empowerment was promoted during elections to attract female voters' confidence.

Nevertheless, women represent the minority in iMpendle Local Municipality, and their roles are subject to administrative support. The authors suggested that traditional and social norms primarily shaped the implementation and practice of gender policies in the municipality. Khonjelwayo and Zondi (2025) further established that the municipality faces significant institutional capacity constraints, including budgetary constraints, limited gender expertise, and poor monitoring systems. Lastly, clients and coalitions, the local municipality has not implemented the clause on the inclusion of local women, community-based organisations (CBOs) and feminist advocacy groups in policy formulation and development processes, which limits the prescripts of WEGEP (Khonjelwayo & Zondi, 2025). The 5C protocol, as an analytical lens for examining the underrepresentation of women in key strategic roles within public administration, particularly in iMpendle Local Municipality, reveals two dominant narratives of women empowerment: the

existence of policy intent and the non-existence of women lived experiences.

4.6 The Impact of Patriarchal Conditioning

Although the underrepresentation of women in public policy draws us to the narrative of male domination in South African politics, there is an undertone of patriarchal conditioning that underscores an individual's decision to apply for a job or to be silent about challenges faced by women once appointed. This view is supported by Taylor (2023), Ahmed (2024), Tshingilane (2024), who concurred that women face barriers that limit their ability to assert their positive ideals. These barriers disempower them from offering their knowledge and experiences to enhance human understanding. *"Oppression of self-expression no doubt has implications for the attainment of social justice in society more generally"* (Tshingilane, 2024: 5). For example, senior female officials from local municipalities and government departments reported toxic work environments at the 2021 Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) hearings into gender transformation in the public sector (Shomolekae, 2023). Notably, one director revealed that she was often excluded from executive meetings, where key strategic decisions were made. At the same time, her male colleagues were credited for her work, and her acquisition of the position was questioned (Shomolekae, 2023).

Similarly, council women reported exclusion from critical decision-making and policy-making meetings (Maluleke & Maluleke, 2024). These cases align closely with Olaitan's perspective, which illustrates how formal inclusion does not necessarily equate to substantive empowerment unless supported by feminist advocacy coalitions. These systemic patterns are not limited to South Africa or KZN. Still, in other developing countries, such as India, despite the implementation of the Panchayati Raj gender quota system, which reserves one-third of local government seats for women, many female councillors report being proxy representatives, with male family members influencing or even making decisions on their behalf (Mahanandia & Tripathy, 2025). This shows that silencing of women is not about fear in a simplistic sense but about the internal and external intersectoral conditions shaped by long-standing gender norms and systemic inequality. This study is of the view that patriarchal conditioning disempowers activism in women by enforcing social compliance and silencing dissenting voices. Msila (2022) explained that from a young age, girls and adults are conditioned to be obedient and non-confrontational in society, which contradicts the boldness and resistance of activism. Moyo and Muchabaiwa (2025) referred to this conditioning as a psychological barrier, creating doubt about women's qualifications and experience as leaders or policymakers.

One aspect is South Africa's political history, where women played a fundamental role in liberation movements, such as the 1956 Women's March to the Union Buildings; their contributions are commemorated as significant,

but they were undervalued in the post-apartheid era (Lenser, 2019). Moyo and Muchabaiwa (2025) made a compelling argument that, while women empowerment policies aim to achieve SDG5 and inclusion in political processes, the underlying patriarchal conditioning relegates feminists and activists to support roles rather than leading or challenging the status quo.

5. CONCLUSION

This article reviews the literature on women's empowerment, specifically in South Africa, KZN and iMpendle's Local Municipality, highlighting how patriarchal norms, internalised and systemic, shape women's experiences in leadership and governance. As pointed out in the literature review, patriarchy is a social system where men hold power and dominance over women in various aspects of life, including politics, the economy, and culture. This system creates gender inequality and discrimination against women, which, in turn, leads to patriarchal conditioning. Women view themselves as inadequate to hold public office or play significant roles in public policy, because of marginalisation, male dominance and conditioning to supportive roles. To achieve social justice, this study emphasises the importance of implementing equity regulations and legislation at the recruitment, appointment, and promotion levels, and adopting Girlchild program principles, such as mentorship of junior women staff by senior female staff, as well as developing a strategic plan to dismantle systemic institutional barriers. This study does not sadistically negate men in public administration, but re-engineers public administration as a key strategic tool for gender parity and social justice.

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