



Local Government Association of Zambia

GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI) IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT



TABLE OF CONTENTS

i

Foreword

ii

Acknowledgements

04.

1.0 Foundations of GESI in the Zambian Context

17.

1.1 Civic Representation and Inclusion

19.

1.2 Institutionalizing GESI in Municipal Operations

22.

1.3 Checklist for an Inclusive, Gender-Responsive Local Authority

28.

1.4 Checklist for Organizing Community or Town Hall Meetings

31.

REFERENCES

Foreword

Local government is the sphere of government closest to the people. Every day, councillors and council officers take decisions that shape who can reach a clinic, trade safely in a market, walk home after dark, sit on a Ward Development Committee, or be heard in a town hall meeting. Those decisions either open the door to every resident, including women and men, youth and older persons with disabilities, and communities in remote wards, or they leave some people standing outside it.

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) is therefore not an optional add-on to municipal work. It is a legal duty under the Constitution of Zambia, the Gender Equity and Equality Act, 2015, the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2012, the Local Government Act No. 2 of 2019, the Electoral Process (Amendment) Act, 2026, and the National Gender Policy (2023). It is also sound practice. Inclusive councils plan better, spend more fairly, deliver services that people actually use, and earn the public confidence on which local democracy depends.

This module has been prepared by the Local Government Association of Zambia (LGAZ) to help elected leaders and administrators turn that duty into everyday habit. It sets out the concepts that underpin GESI, the national and international instruments that bind local authorities, and the practical steps required in civic representation, municipal operations, budgeting, procurement, safeguarding, and community engagement. The checklists, reflection questions and worked examples are designed for use in council chambers, standing committees, Ward Development Committees and town hall meetings, not only in workshops.

LGAZ adopted a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy precisely because representation and service delivery will not become inclusive by chance. Each council is encouraged to adopt its own GESI policy or strategy, set measurable targets for committees and WDCs, collect sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data, and report openly to residents on progress. Where national or Association benchmarks exist, councils should apply them; where they do not yet exist, councils should set their own until a common standard is confirmed.

I commend this module to every Mayor, Council Chairperson, Councillor and council officer. Read it. Use the checklists before the next major decision. Invite the voices that are usually missing. The measure of our success will not be the existence of this document, but whether women, youth, persons with disabilities and other marginalized residents can see and feel the difference in the services and decisions of their local authority.

On behalf of the Presidency and the entire membership of LGAZ, I thank the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and the Government of Canada for walking with Zambian local government on this journey through the Partnerships for Municipal Innovation – Women in Local Leadership (PMI-WILL) project. Inclusive, gender responsive local government is how we localise the Sustainable Development Goals and honour the constitutional promise that no one is left behind.

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Acknowledgments

This module on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) in Local Government is a collective effort. The Local Government Association of Zambia (LGAZ) thanks those whose expertise and lived experience have shaped it.

We thank the Government of Canada and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) for the financial and technical support through the Partnerships for Municipal Innovation – Women in Local Leadership (PMI-WILL) project, which has strengthened women's leadership, gender-responsive services and provided gender analysis and service assessment tools for local authorities.

We acknowledge the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development for endorsing the incorporation this module in the manual for the orientation of councillors and officers.

Special thanks also go to the team at the Chalimbana Local Government Training Institute for providing invaluable input.

GESI is a shared duty of elected leaders, administrators and communities. LGAZ will accompany local authorities as they put this module into practice.

1.0 Foundations of GESI in the Zambian Context

Local government is the sphere of government closest to the people. It is responsible for public services, local development, citizen participation, and overall quality of life. Councillors and council officers have a duty to ensure that every resident has an equal opportunity to access municipal services and participate in governance, regardless of sex, age, disability, social status, or geographical location.

To ensure parity, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) is a practical framework to guide Councillors and Officers in discharging their civic duty. It promotes fairness, equal opportunity, and meaningful participation.

Furthermore, it recognizes that different individuals and groups have varying needs, face distinct barriers, and experience different levels of benefit when accessing public services. Consequently, this framework helps local authorities remain inclusive and responsive to societal needs. This section sets out the conceptual, legal, and policy foundations for GESI.

a) Core Conceptual Definitions

A shared understanding of key GESI concepts helps ensure that council policies and decisions rest on fairness, equality and inclusion rather than misconceptions or stereotypes.

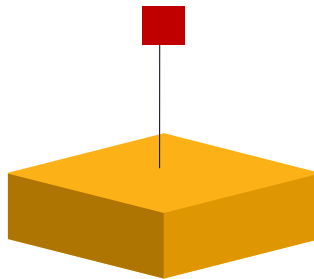
GESI recognises that although people have equal rights and aspirations, historical, cultural, economic, physical and institutional barriers may prevent some groups from participating in governance or benefiting from development. GESI, therefore, exists to identify and remove those barriers.



1.0a: Core GESI Concepts

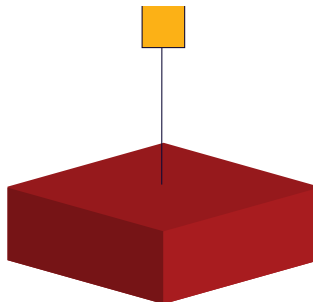
Sex vs. Gender

Sex refers to the biological characteristics that distinguish women and men. Gender refers to the socially and culturally constructed roles, responsibilities, behaviours and expectations assigned to women, men, girls and boys, which vary across cultures and change over time, and which can affect who attends meetings, accesses services or benefits from council programmes.



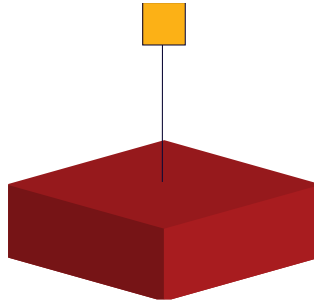
Gender Equality

Equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities and treatment for women and men - not sameness, but ensuring that opportunity, treatment and access to resources do not depend on sex. In councils, this means equal opportunity to attend meetings, contest office, access services and benefit from development.



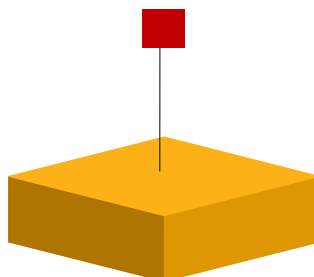
Social Inclusion

The practice of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised - including women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, low-income households and remote communities - in social, economic and political life.



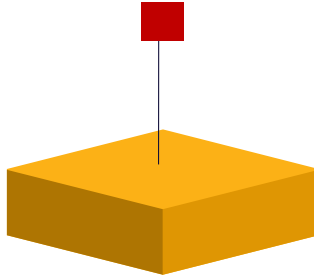
Gender Equity

Fairness in distributing opportunities, resources and benefits, recognising that different starting points may require different, targeted measures (e.g., support for women traders) to reach equal outcomes.



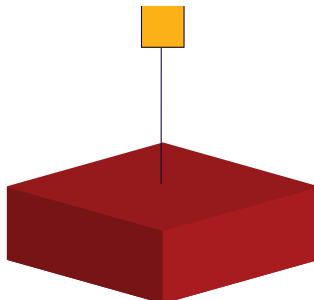
Marginalisation

The systematic exclusion of, or limiting of access for, certain groups from opportunities and privileges enjoyed by the wider society, due to unfair institutional arrangements or biased societal values. Individuals or groups may be marginalised on the basis of gender, disability, economic status or geography.



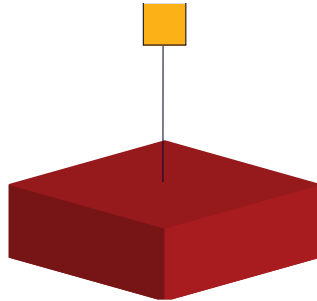
Intersectionality

Recognises that an individual holds multiple social identities simultaneously - such as sex, disability, age, poverty and location - which overlap to create unique, compounded forms of disadvantage that single-issue responses cannot fully address.



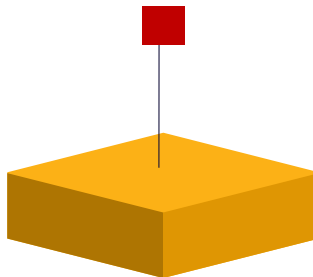
Gender Transformative Approaches (GTA)

A way of designing policies and programmes that address the deep, root causes of gender-based inequality. Rather than merely helping people cope with unfair treatment, GTA actively changes the unequal power relations, harmful norms and biased rules between women and men to create lasting, structural fairness.



Gender Mainstreaming

Assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, and integrating gender considerations into the design, budgeting, implementation and monitoring of all council policies, programmes and services, rather than treating gender as a separate, stand-alone activity.



b) National Legal and Policy Frameworks

GESI is a legal and policy obligation, not merely good practice. Zambia's legislative and policy instruments require public institutions, including local authorities, to promote equality, prohibit discrimination and mainstream gender and social inclusion into governance, planning and service delivery. Councillors and council officers should treat GESI as part of their statutory responsibility. The following four instruments are of particular relevance:

Table 1.0b: National Legal and Policy Frameworks for GESI

Instrument	Key GESI Provision	Implication for Councils
Gender Equity and Equality Act, 2015	Establishes the Gender Equity and Equality Commission; mandates gender mainstreaming in public institutions' policies, programmes and budgets; provides for affirmative action.	Integrate the principles of fairness and equality into planning, budgeting and delivery of services; ensure equal opportunities in recruitment; use sex-disaggregated data.
Persons with Disabilities Act, 2012	Guarantees equal rights, accessibility and non-discrimination for persons with disabilities in public life and services.	Ensure disability inclusion is an integral part of public premises, infrastructure and local development. Further, ensure accessibility by PWDs to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment.
Electoral Process (Amendment) Act 2026	Strengthens provisions for inclusive political participation and representation, including of women and persons with disabilities, in electoral and representative processes.	Enforce the requirements for equitable representation and participation in the council. Ensuring that the interests of women, youth and persons with disabilities are represented.
National Gender Policy (2023)	Provides strategic direction for gender mainstreaming across all sectors of Government, including local government.	Align local plans, budgets and development projects and programmes, including public services have gender considerations.

The above legal and policy instruments operate alongside other complementary legal protections - including the Anti-Gender-Based Violence Act No. 1 of 2011, which underpins community safety measures discussed in Section 5.1.2, and Zambia's international and regional commitments. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Together, these instruments reinforce the country's obligation to promote inclusive, gender-responsive and disability-inclusive governance and ensure that no one is left behind.

Practical Example: Applying the Legal Framework Locally: A council reviewing a new bus station design, for instance, is not simply exercising discretion when it adds ramps, accessible toilets and adequate lighting - it is meeting obligations under the Persons with Disabilities Act and the Gender Equity and Equality Act. Similarly, a council that actively encourages women and persons with disabilities to stand for, or be nominated to, WDC and other representative positions is giving practical effect to the Electoral Process (Amendment) Act 2026 and the National Gender Policy, rather than simply doing a favour to particular individuals.



c) GESI in Local Government: Aligning GESI with the National Legal and Policy Framework

The Constitution of Zambia affirms equality of women and men and provides for the promotion of gender equity in governance structures (such as Councils and National Assembly) and processes (Planning and Budgeting).

In addition, the Gender Equity and Equality Act requires public institutions to mainstream gender in policies, programmes and budgets. This section seeks to strengthen local authorities' capacity to deliver inclusive, gender-responsive services, and to create an enabling environment for women's leadership and participation. Integrating GESI into this Orientation Manual institutionalises inclusion and gender across all local authorities in Zambia. In practical terms, this alignment rests on four pillars:

- ▶ **Democratic Governance:** Article 151(1)(b) of the Constitution and the Local Government Act No. 2 of 2019 anchor citizen participation in, and control of, decision-making by the people at the local level - the foundation for inclusive local governance.
- ▶ **Devolution:** Fairness in resource allocation and equitable distribution of development benefits across wards and population groups, so that decentralised authority translates into decentralised opportunity.
- ▶ **Inclusive, Gender-Responsive Municipal Services:** Article 151(2)(d) of the Constitution requires local government to render services that are responsive to the needs of all residents, including women, persons with disabilities, youths and older persons.
- ▶ **Representation and Diversity:** The Electoral Process Act, 2026 and the Local Government Act No. 2 of 2019 provides for representation and diversity - of gender, persons with disabilities and youth - in the Council as well as Ward Development Committees (WDCs), the primary formal structures through which citizens participate in governance. In practice, this means councils should set clear, transparent, published criteria for WDC and committee selection, actively canvass nominations from women, youth and persons with disabilities rather than waiting for them to come forward, and report annually - to council and to the community - on how representative these structures actually are.



Practical Implications Highlights: In particular, councils should: promote equal participation of women and men in local governance, ensure that public participation processes are inclusive and accessible, and ensure the Council and Ward Development Committees reflect the diversity of their communities. Further, councils should integrate gender considerations into planning, budgeting and recruitment, encourage women's participation in local leadership, and use sex-disaggregated data to inform planning and monitoring; and uphold fairness, transparency and non-discrimination across all council programmes, services and workplaces



To make this concrete rather than aspirational, each council should adopt its own GESI policy or strategy that sets out clear, measurable representation targets for committees, WDCs, town hall meetings and council meetings - for example, a minimum share of positions reserved for women, youth and persons with disabilities - rather than leaving representation to chance. Where LGAZ or national policy sets a specific target, councils should adopt that figure; where none yet exists, each council should set its own until a national benchmark is confirmed.

d) Rationale for Promoting GESI in Local Government

GESI is not about preferential treatment for one group. It means that council policies, plans, budgets, infrastructure and services respond to the diverse needs of women, men, girls, boys, older persons, youths, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups. For councillors, GESI means inclusive decision-making that reflects the interests of all constituents; for council officers, it means planning, budgeting, implementing and monitoring in ways that promote equal access and benefit for all. The imperatives below explain why this matters.

What GESI Means for Councillors

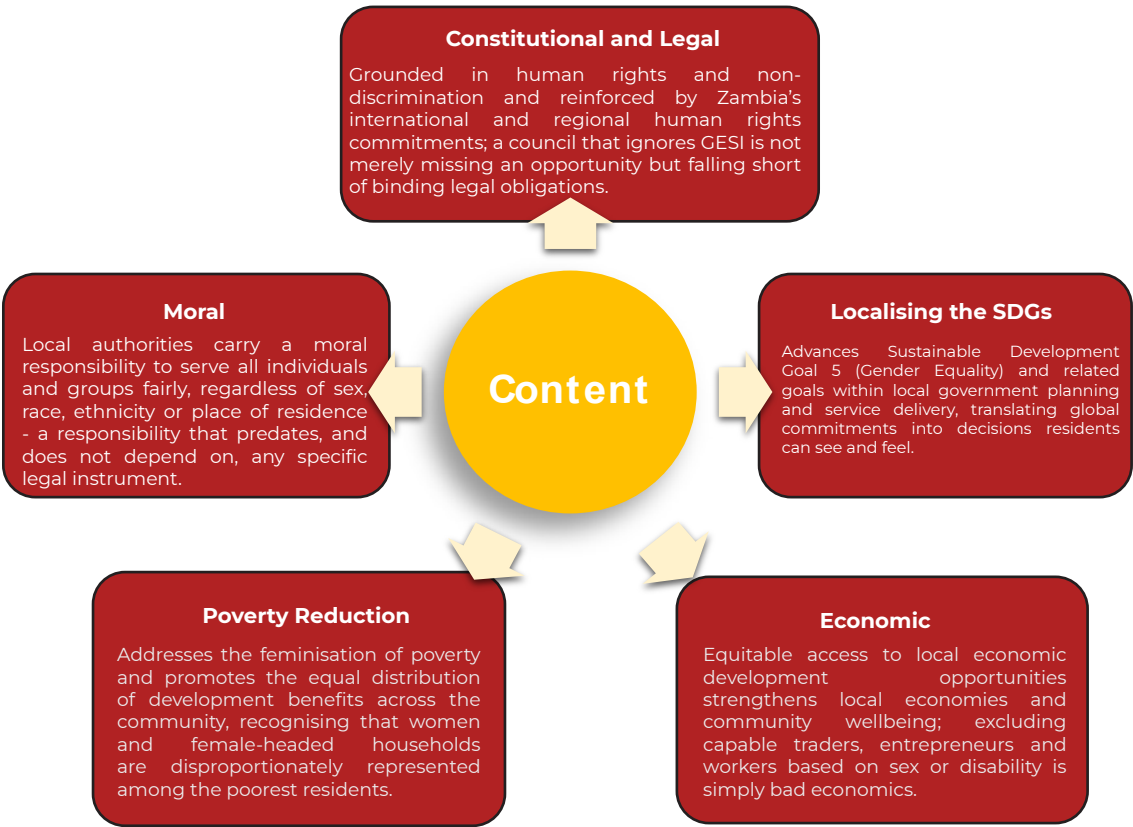
For councillors, GESI means inclusive decision-making that reflects the interests of all constituents - and, concretely, it means women, youth and persons with disabilities having a genuine seat at the decision-making table, not only a presence in public consultations. Wards, standing committees and other council structures should include women's representation as a matter of course. Councils should ensure, so far as possible, that no standing committee is constituted without a woman member, and should treat this as a standing objective whenever committees are formed or reconstituted, rather than an outcome left to chance.



What GESI Means for Administrators

For council officers, GESI means planning, budgeting, implementing and monitoring in ways that promote equal access and benefit for all - translating the political commitment set out above into the day-to-day systems, budgets and services described in Sections 1.3 and 1.4. The imperatives below explain why this matters to both councillors and administrators.

1.0d: Rationale for GESI in Local Government



Applying GESI enables councils to: improve citizen participation and accountability; enhance the quality and accessibility of municipal services; promote equitable local economic development; strengthen public confidence in local government; reduce inequalities within communities; and contribute to Zambia's national development objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Practical Example: A Councillor's Decision - Approving the Ward Infrastructure Budget. When a ward councillor reviews a proposed capital budget, GESI means asking not only whether the budget is affordable, but who it will serve. A budget that funds only a football pitch and a market shelter - decided without consulting women traders, youth or persons with disabilities — may overlook a broken footbridge that cuts off part of the ward in the rainy season, or the absence of a ramp at the clinic. A councillor applying a GESI lens uses committee oversight and ward consultations to test proposed allocations against the needs of different groups before approving them, not after construction has begun.



Practical Example: Consulting on a District Integrated Development Plan (IDP)

When preparing an IDP, the council should organise stakeholder consultations at times and locations that are convenient and accessible to different members of the community. Meetings should not be attended only by traditional leaders and community elites, but should also include women, youths, persons with disabilities, traders and farmers. In practice, this means giving advance notice through more than one channel (radio, ward notice boards, community leaders), choosing accessible venues and convenient times, and deliberately inviting women's groups, youth associations, traders' associations and organisations representing persons with disabilities - rather than relying on whoever happens to hear about the meeting informally. Section 5.1.5 sets out a detailed checklist for organising such meetings.

Practical Example: Designing a New Community Market

A planning team made up only of male traders and council engineers drew up an early layout for a new market that did not include lighting, childcare space or accessible toilets — because these were not priorities for the people in the room. When the council consulted women traders, a youth representative and a person with a disability before finalising the design, each raised a different gap: the women traders raised security and lighting after dark; the youth representative raised safe cycle parking; the person with a disability raised step-free access and accessible toilets.

None of these needs would have been identified by the original planning team alone. This is the core justification for GESI: involving different lenses does not simply make a project fairer — it makes it more likely to succeed, because the people who understand a problem best are usually the people who experience it.

Key Message: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion is not the responsibility of one department or officer. It is a cross-cutting governance approach, grounded in law and sound practice, that should inform every council decision, policy, programme, budget and service.

Reflection Questions

1. Before moving to the next section, councillors and council officers should consider:
2. Which of the concepts in Table 1.1a are least understood within my council, and how might these be addressed?
3. Which national and international legal or policy provisions are already being applied in my council's work, and which need greater attention?
4. Where does my council currently fall short of the four pillars of alignment set out in 1.1(c)?
5. What measures are we going to put in place to address the gaps identified in 3 above?

1.1 Civic Representation and Inclusion

Having set out what GESI means in principle for both councillors and administrators, this section turns to the first practical entry point: how councils are represented and how citizens are engaged.

Inclusive local governance depends on ensuring that the structures, meetings and alliances operating at ward and community levels actively represent and engage the full diversity of residents. Where these arenas exclude women, youth, persons with disabilities or other groups, councils lose valuable perspectives and communities lose trust in local government. The themes below set out practical entry points for building genuinely representative and inclusive local governance.



Table 1.1: Civic Representation and Inclusion

Theme	Practice Guidance
Democratising Ward Development Committees (WDCs)	Apply best practice to ensure gender equity and inclusion in the composition and functioning of WDCs and other sub-district structures, including transparent selection processes and deliberate encouragement of women's, youth's and PWDs' participation.
Inclusive Citizen Engagement	Host accessible public meetings and consultations, giving attention to timing, venue and sign-language integration so that all residents - including those with caregiving responsibilities, disabilities or mobility constraints - can participate.
Advocacy for Marginalised Groups	Represent the needs and interests of vulnerable women, youth, elderly, and children in council chambers and decision-making processes, ensuring their priorities are reflected in council business and not only raised informally, for example through dedicated agenda items or standing invitations to relevant interest groups and community associations.
Traditional Leadership Alliances	Partner with traditional leaders to address Gender Based Violence, and to protect women's and children's rights and to address customary land allocation barriers, including women's property rights, recognising traditional leadership as a key ally in advancing inclusion rather than an obstacle to be worked around.
Community Safety and Anti-Gender-Based Violence (GBV)	Map local GBV referral mechanisms under the Anti-Gender-Based Violence Act and use the Mayor's/Council Chairperson's/Councillor's office and influence to promote safe public and community spaces, particularly around markets, bus stations and public lighting, where the risk of harassment and violence is often highest.

Good Practice: Inclusive Consultations

Hold community consultations at venues that are physically accessible and at times that allow women, youths and other community members to participate. Provide information in accessible formats and local languages and arrange sign-language interpretation where needed. Section 5.1.5 provides a detailed checklist for organising inclusive community and town hall meetings.

Practical Example: Composing an Inclusive Ward Development Committee

A WDC selection process that relies only on existing community leaders, or that is announced at short notice at a single village meeting, tends to reproduce the same narrow group of participants. A more inclusive process publicises vacancies widely, actively invites nominations of women, youths and persons with disabilities, and sets clear, transparent criteria for selection - so that the WDC that emerges genuinely reflects the ward it serves, rather than only its most vocal or visible members.

Key Message: Representation is the entry point for inclusion. Where WDCs, public meetings and traditional structures genuinely reflect the diversity of the community, the priorities of women, youth, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups are far more likely to be reflected in council decisions.

Reflection Questions

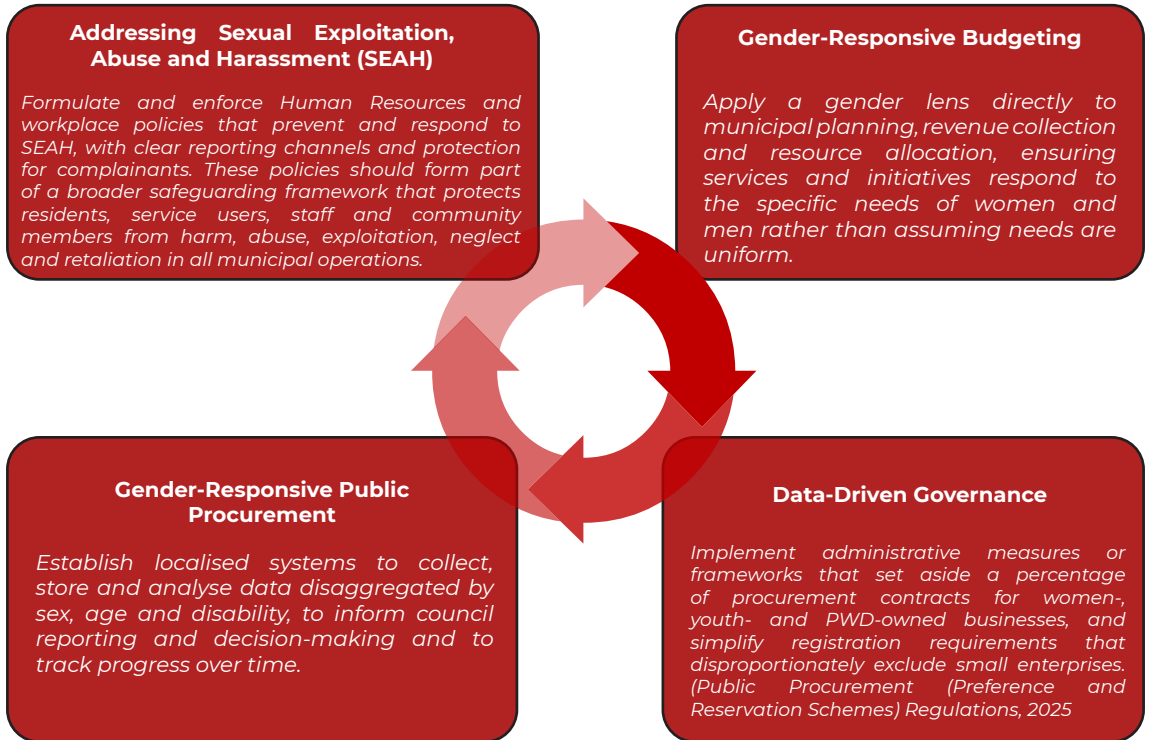
1. Does the composition of WDCs and other community structures in my area reflect the diversity of the community they serve?
2. What barriers currently prevent women, youths or persons with disabilities from participating fully in public meetings?
3. What measures are we going to take to address the barriers in 2 above?
4. How effectively does my council work with traditional leadership on GESI-related concerns?

1.2 Institutionalizing GESI in Municipal Operations

Where Section 1.2 addressed who participates in local governance, this section addresses how councils sustain that participation through their own internal systems

Representation and participation must be matched by institutional systems that sustain inclusion through everyday council operations, not only through one-off initiatives or events. Embedding GESI within human resource management, budgeting, procurement and data systems ensures that gains made through consultation and representation are not lost once the immediate spotlight moves elsewhere.

1.2a: Institutionalizing GESI in Municipal Operations



Beyond these four priority areas, GESI should be embedded across other core council functions so that institutionalisation is comprehensive rather than confined to a few departments.

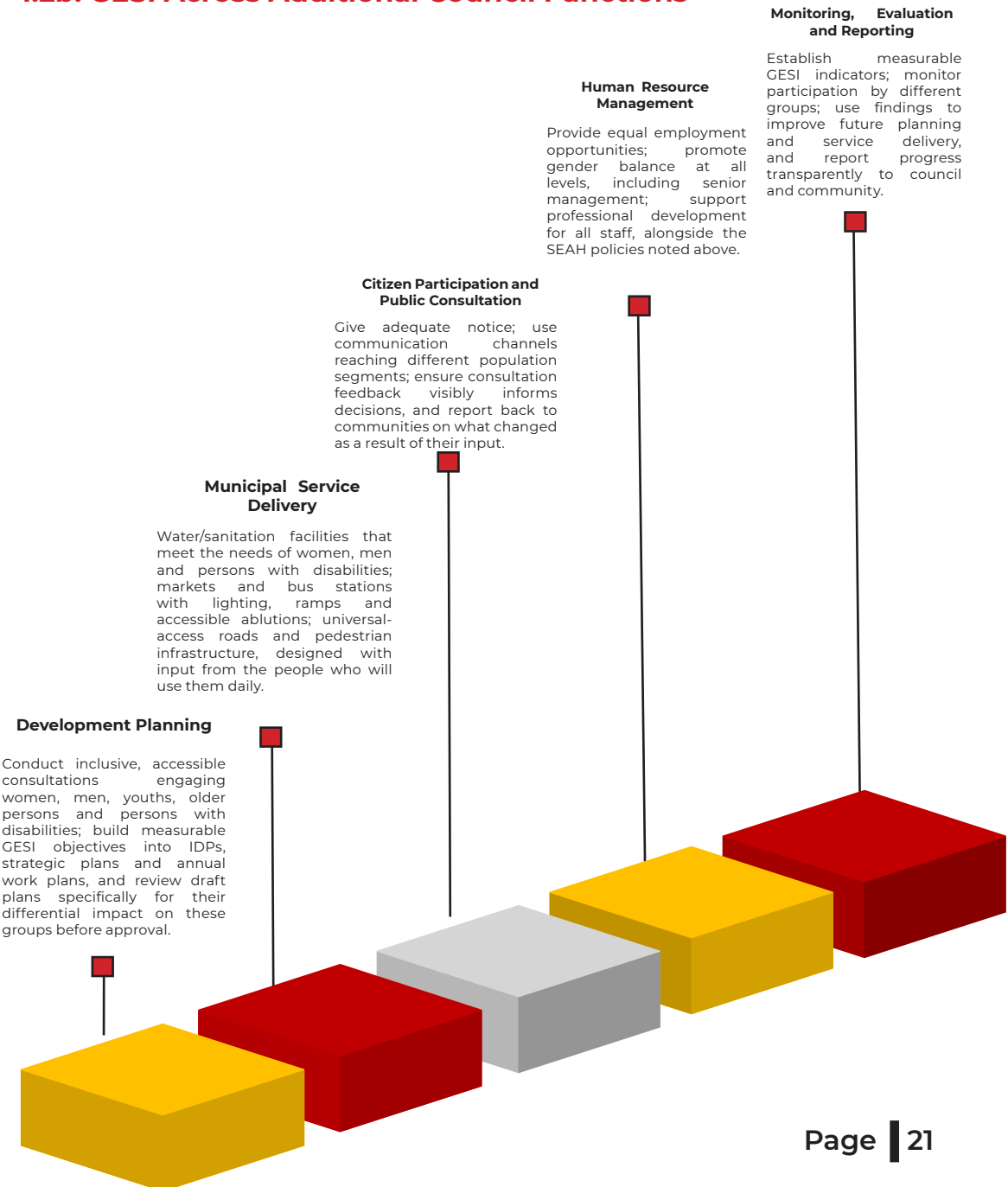
Practical Example: A SEAH Policy in Action

A council with a clear SEAH policy does more than stating that harassment is unacceptable. It designates a confidential reporting channel independent of an alleged offender's direct supervisor, sets out a fair investigation procedure with defined timeframes, protects complainants from retaliation, and ensures every new employee and elected official receives an orientation briefing on the policy - so that the protection it offers is enforceable and predictable, not just based on paper.

Municipal operations bring councils into regular contact with children, young people, persons with disabilities, older persons, marketeers, transport users, survivors of violence and other residents who may face heightened risk of harm, abuse, exploitation, neglect, discrimination or intimidation. A safeguarding policy helps the council prevent harm, respond promptly when concerns arise, and ensure that staff, councillors, volunteers, contractors and service providers understand their duty to protect residents who interact with council services and facilities.

Safeguarding should therefore be integrated into human resource management, public consultations, service delivery, procurement, community engagement and complaints handling. The policy should define unacceptable conduct, set standards of behaviour, provide safe reporting channels, protect complainants and witnesses from retaliation, and require timely referral to appropriate authorities or specialised services where necessary. It should also apply to contractors and partners delivering services on behalf of the council, so that safeguarding obligations follow the service wherever it is delivered.

1.2b: GESI Across Additional Council Functions



Promoting GESI is ultimately a shared responsibility. Councillors provide political leadership and policy direction while council officers integrate GESI principles into planning, budgeting, administration and service delivery. Effective institutionalisation of GESI requires close collaboration between elected leaders, council management, technical staff and communities. Section 1.4 sets out, in practical terms, what this looks like for councillors and council officers respectively.

Key Message: Institutionilising GESI does not require new departments or large additional budgets. It requires applying an inclusive lens consistently to existing systems -human resources, budgeting, procurement and data - so that inclusion outlives any single project or personality

Practical Example: Gender-Responsive Procurement in Practice

A council reviewing its procurement processes might find that registration fees, collateral requirements or the sheer length of the tendering process effectively exclude small, women- or youth-owned enterprises, even where no rule explicitly discriminates against them. Setting aside a defined percentage of lower-value contracts for such enterprises, simplifying registration requirements and publicising opportunities through channels that reach smaller traders can measurably widen participation without compromising value for money.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the four priority areas in Table 1.3a is weakest in my council, and why?
2. Does my council's procurement process create unintended barriers for women-, youth- or PWD-owned businesses?
3. What disaggregated data does my council currently collect, and what gaps remain?
4. Does my council have a safeguarding policy with clear prevention, reporting, referral and accountability procedures for municipal operations?

1.3 Checklist for an Inclusive, Gender-Responsive Local Authority

Councillors and council officers each have distinct but complementary roles in advancing GESI, and the checklists below are designed to be used by both when making decisions, planning projects or reviewing council performance. Used together, they move a council from broad principle to day-to-day practice: the role list clarify who is responsible for what; the checklist and key-questions tables provide a structured way of testing individual decisions and projects; the indicators describe what success looks like over time; and the challenges table anticipates the most common obstacles councils encounter

Councillors: Five Practical Roles

- ▶ Promote inclusive representation of women, youths, older persons, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups.
- ▶ Champion inclusive decision-making by weighing the impact of policies, projects and budgets on all groups.
- ▶ Support inclusive community participation in WDCs and public consultations, particularly by underrepresented groups.
- ▶ Approve inclusive policies and budgets that promote equitable access to services and opportunities.
- ▶ Exercise oversight to confirm that programmes are implemented fairly and reach intended beneficiaries.



Council Officers: Six Practical Roles

- ▶ Integrate GESI into planning from the outset, not as an afterthought.
- ▶ Apply gender-responsive budgeting so proposals respond to different groups' needs.
- ▶ Deliver services that are accessible, responsive and beneficial to all.
- ▶ Collect, analyse and use sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data.
- ▶ Promote an inclusive workplace culture of equality, professionalism and non-discrimination.
- ▶ Monitor and report progress using appropriate GESI indicators.

Table 1.3a: Checklist for an Inclusive, Gender-Responsive Local Authority

No.	Checklist Questions
1	Is there a gender policy in the council and is it being implemented?
2	What is the percentage of women councillors?
3	Are women equitably represented in senior positions of the council such as mayor or chairperson and committee chairperson?
4	Are women equitably represented in executive positions such as departmental and sectional heads?
5	Does the local authority have a policy on internal career development for its employees, particularly women, that supports their upward mobility?
6	Does the council allocate a reasonable percentage of its training budget to knowledge and skills training for women?
7	Has the council adopted a sexual harassment policy, with specified disciplinary and appeal mechanisms?
8	Do council officials receive training in gender analysis and gender planning?
9	Does the council provide disaggregated data on the basis of gender for the district, with relevant figures such as employment and income?
10	In organizing community meetings, does the local authority ensure that meeting venues are accessible by all?

Table 1.3b: Key Questions Before Any Major Council Decision

Category	Key Questions
Participation	Have all relevant stakeholders been consulted, including women, young people, persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups, on an equal footing?
Planning	Does the project address a genuine community need, account for the needs of different users, and reduce (rather than increase) inequalities?
Budgeting	Are resources distributed fairly, will all communities benefit, and are sufficient resources allocated for accessibility?
Infrastructure	Is the facility accessible and safe for women, children and older persons, and does the design promote universal access?
Service Delivery	Who benefits from this service, who might be excluded, and what adjustments can improve inclusion?

Indicators of a GESI-Responsive Local Authority

- ▶ Inclusive public consultations
- ▶ Accessible public infrastructure
- ▶ Gender-responsive budgets
- ▶ Diverse participation in committees and WDCs
- ▶ Fair employment practices
- ▶ Evidence-based planning using disaggregated data
- ▶ Equitable access to council services
- ▶ Effective partnerships with communities and civil society organisations
- ▶ Leadership commitment to equality and inclusion
- ▶ Continuous monitoring and improvement

Table 1.3c: Common Challenges and Suggested Responses

Challenge	Suggested Response
Low participation of women in meetings	Have all relevant stakeholders been consulted, including women, young people, persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups, on an equal footing?
Inaccessible public facilities	Incorporate universal design principles during planning and rehabilitation.
Limited GESI knowledge among councillors or officers	Conduct regular orientation and capacity-building programmes.
Limited availability of disaggregated data	Strengthen data collection and management systems.
Limited financial resources	Integrate GESI into existing programmes rather than creating separate initiatives.
Resistance to change	Promote awareness, leadership commitment and continuous stakeholder engagement.

Practical Tips

- ▶ Consult widely before making important decisions.
- ▶ Remove barriers to participation and ensure council information is accessible to all residents.
- ▶ Consider the needs of different groups when planning projects, and monitor who benefits.
- ▶ Continuously improve policies and services based on community feedback.

Five Practical Commitments



Key Message: Promoting Gender Equality and Social Inclusion is a shared responsibility. Councillors provide political leadership, council officers ensure effective implementation, and communities actively participate in shaping inclusive local development.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the indicators of a GESI-responsive local authority does my council already demonstrate, and which need attention?
2. Which of the common challenges listed in Table 1.4c is most relevant to my council, and what would a realistic first step look like?
3. How will my council know, twelve months from now, that it has become more inclusive?

1.4 Checklist for Organising Community or Town Hall Meetings

Community and town hall meetings are among the most visible expressions of local democracy, and among the easiest places for exclusion to happen unnoticed. Ensuring every voice is heard and valued requires deliberate planning before the meeting, careful facilitation during it, and honest follow-through afterwards. Councillors and council officers should apply the checklist below at each of these three stages.

A well-organised meeting ensures fair representation, diverse perspectives and meaningful community impact. Used consistently, this checklist turns the principles of civic representation and inclusion set out in Section 1.2 into routine, everyday practice.

Practical Example: A Tale of Two Town Hall Meetings

A meeting announced only through a notice pinned at the council office, held mid-morning on a weekday at a venue reached by a flight of stairs, will predictably draw mostly men who work nearby and can attend on short notice. The same meeting, announced a week in advance through radio, community leaders and ward notice boards, held at a convenient time in an accessible venue with seating and a sign-language interpreter present, and facilitated to actively invite contributions from women, youths and persons with disabilities, is far more likely to produce a discussion - and resulting decisions - that reflect the whole community rather than a narrow segment of it.



1.4: Checklist for Inclusive Community or Town Hall Meetings

Before the Meeting

- Identify stakeholders - include diverse community members (women, youth, persons with disabilities, elders, marginalised groups).
- Choose an accessible venue - ensure ramps, seating and facilities for people with disabilities.
- Set a convenient time - avoid conflicts with work hours, religious days or cultural events.
- Provide language options - arrange translators or sign-language interpreters if needed.
- Prepare clear, inclusive invitations - use multiple platforms (flyers, social media, radio, community leaders).



During the Meeting

- Use simple, clear language - avoid jargon and technical terms.
- Encourage participation - create a safe space for all to speak; use storytelling and interactive discussion.
- Moderate fairly - ensure all voices, especially marginalised ones, are heard.
- Provide assistive tools - microphones, large-print materials and visual aids for accessibility.
- Ensure cultural sensitivity - respect diverse traditions, customs and perspectives.



After the Meeting

- Summarise key points - share resolutions and action points in accessible formats.
- Seek feedback - conduct follow-ups through surveys or direct community input.
- Implement actions - ensure commitments made are followed up with accountability.



Reflection Questions

1. How does my council currently publicise community meetings, and who might be missing this?
2. Are our usual meeting venues and times genuinely accessible to women, older persons, persons with disabilities and working residents?
3. What would change if we applied the After the Meeting checklist consistently to every community engagement?

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