



ACHIEVING THE 50/50  
GENDER PARITY IN GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-  
MAKING POSITIONS IN ZAMBIA

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This memorandum has been prepared in response to the letter from the Clerk of the National Assembly dated 7<sup>th</sup> October 2022 in which ZIPAR is requested to provide input on the study titled “Achieving the 50/50 Gender Parity in Governance and Decision-Making Positions in Zambia” to support the work of the Committee on National Guidance and Gender Matters.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Globally, women continue to be under-represented in decision-making positions. It is well understood that social and economic development can only be attained when there is equal participation of both men and women in the development process. Inspired by such understanding, many Governments have proliferated gender mainstreaming policies, regulations and programs to ensure that both genders are equitably represented and inequalities are not perpetuated. It is also well understood that gender mainstreaming is a process that requires deliberate setting of immediate, medium- and long-term targets and action plans. Zambia remains committed to ensuring the achievement of gender equality and equity in its development agenda. Although the country continues to make strides, it also faces critical challenges in its efforts to achieve the desired national, regional and international gender equality benchmarks. As such, the country is still behind in achieving the 50/50 gender parity representation.

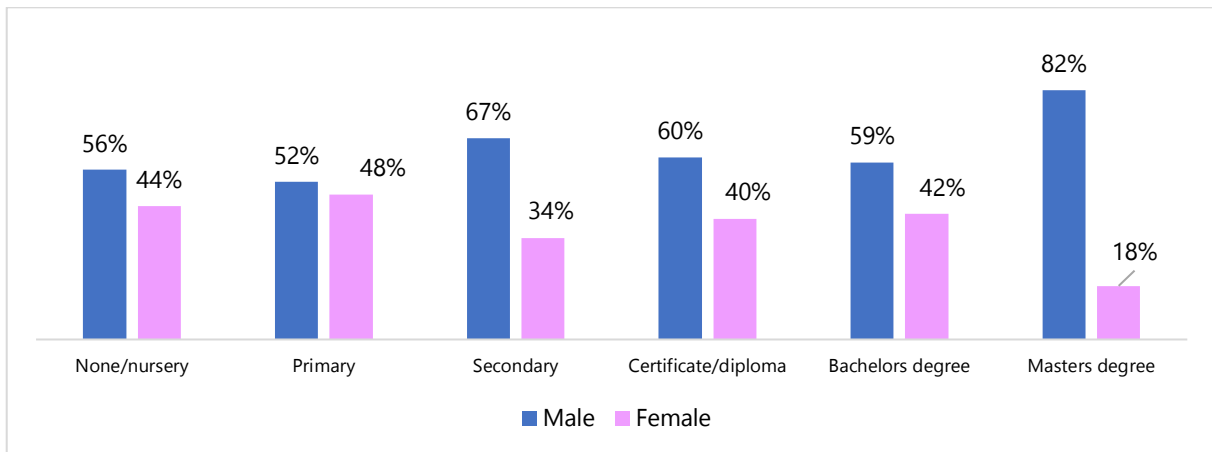
## **2 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN IN ZAMBIA**

### **2.1 Educational Attainment**

Education is a critical factor in the growth and development of a country and one of the main levers for treating gender disparities. Despite Zambia’s provision of free primary education since 2002 and the recent implementation of the Free Education Policy, women have not had equal access to education opportunities as men.

As illustrated in Figure 1, across all education levels, men had higher representation compared to women in 2020. While at lower levels of education attainment, such as primary school, access is almost equal, at higher levels, such as master’s degree, the balance tips in favor of men, who are almost three times likely to attain the degree than women. This in part portrays strong vestiges of a patriarchal society where male guardians or overseers in the family or society had absolute authority on the life choices and circumstances of the members. The patriarchal systems have less regard for the female gender apart from marriage, child bearing and supply of cheap labor.

Figure 1: Education Attainment for employed population by sex (2021)

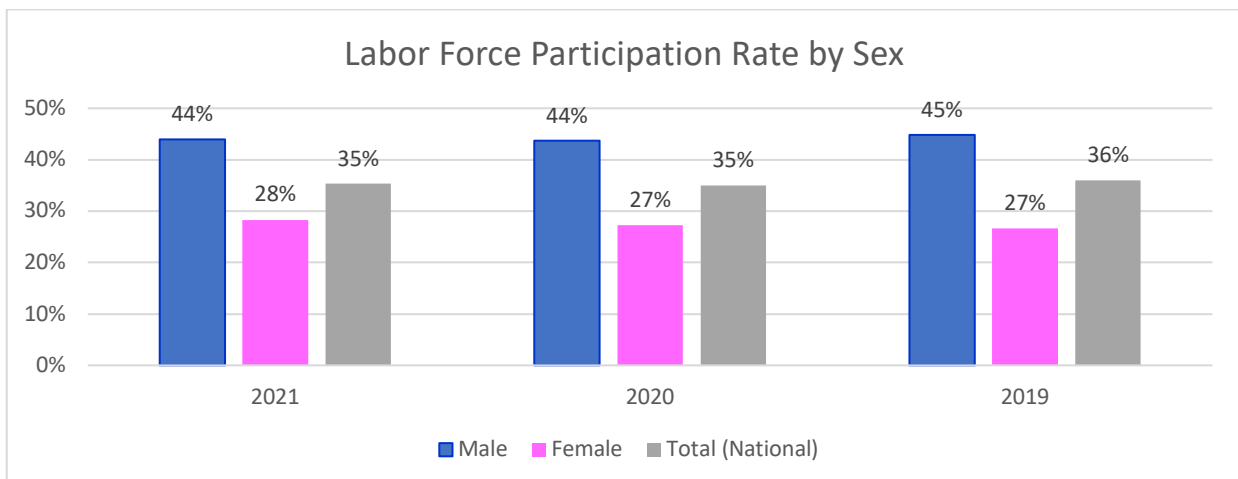


Source: Labor Force Survey 2021

## 2.2 Labor force distribution and Participation

Given the relatively lower educational attainment of women as shown in Section 2.1 above, it is presumed that women would be less competitive in the labor market and by that very fact, their labor participation is lower than that of men<sup>1</sup>. Figure 2 shows the labor force participation rate by sex for the 15 years and older population. Despite the rates not changing since 2019, males had a higher participation rate (44%) in 2021 compared to females at 28%.

Figure 2: Labor Force Participation Rate by Sex (Age 15 and older)



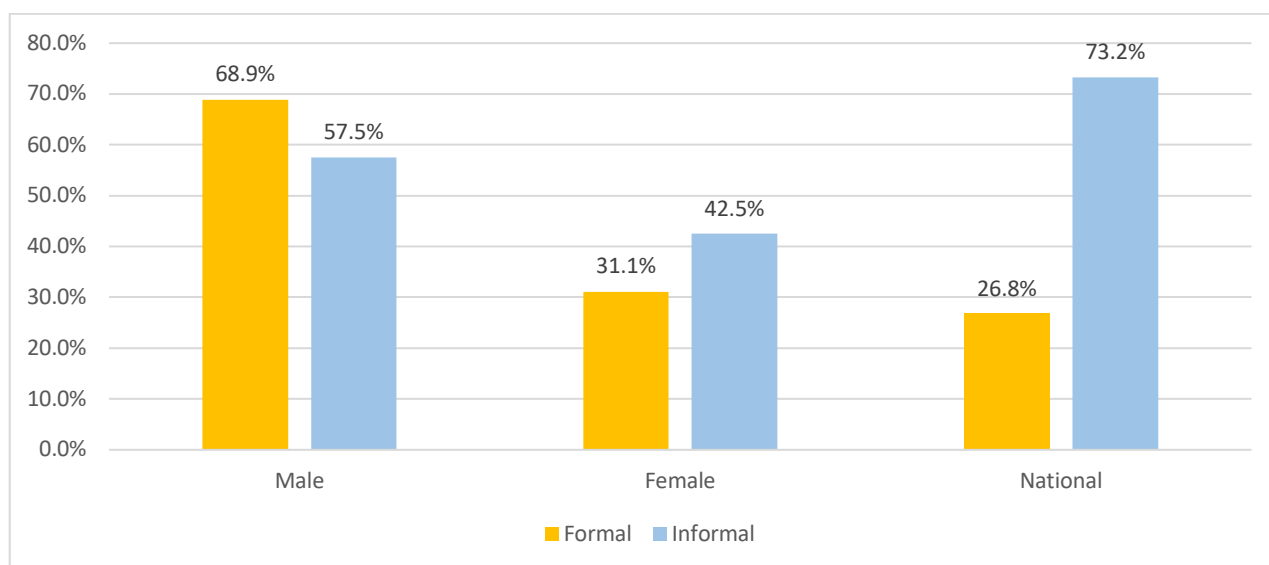
Source: Labor Force Survey 2021

<sup>1</sup> [2021-Labour-Force-Survey-NHPP.pdf](#) The Labor Force Participation rate measures the ratio of labor force to working-age population expressed as a percentage

The lower and stagnant participation rates of women is in part due to the low levels of education attainment which makes them less competitive against their male counterparts and thus, less likely to attain formal employment. This ultimately decreases women’s ability to participate or attain the governance and decision-making positions.

Furthermore, Figure 3 shows the distribution of the population in formal and informal employment by sex. In 2020, formal employment was estimated at 26.2% nationally while formal employment at 74%.

Figure 3: Distribution of Formal Employment (2021)



Source: 2021 Labor Force Survey (LFS)

Analysis by sex shows that, among the formally employed population, males accounted for 69% while females accounted for a disproportionate percentage of 31%. Further, Figure 3 shows that a higher proportion of females who were employed in the informal sector.

This indicates that, given the proportion of the population living below the poverty line at 54%, women headed households who constitute a higher poverty level (57%) compared to their male counterparts (54%) are more disproportionately affected by poverty which disadvantages them from opportunities such as education, access to financial resources and thus, equal participation in the formal economy<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> [2015 Living Conditions Monitoring Survey.pdf](#)

### 3 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Zambia has progressively applied itself on aligning its gender legal frameworks with international standards. The country has gradually strengthened the legal frameworks and policies on gender equality and promotion of women empowerment programmes with the following specific milestones attained.

#### 3.1 International Commitments

Zambia is a signatory to significant declarations considered crucial to the enhancement and mainstreaming of gender equality and equity and thus, the attainment of the 50/50 gender parity benchmark. The ratifications have been used as a guideline in ensuring that the legal and policy frameworks governing gender in Zambia align with international standards. Among the signed declarations are the following:

##### 3.1.1 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Also known as the 'Bill of Rights' for women, the Beijing Declaration aims at advancing the rights of women and gender equality worldwide<sup>3</sup>. Among its 12 thematic areas of focus is the 'representation of women in power and decision- making'. This area reaffirms measures to eliminate discrimination against women by ensuring full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life at the national, regional and international levels is attained.

##### 3.1.2 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development

Article 12 of the Protocol, on 'Representation,' highlights that, by 2015, at least 50% of decision-making positions in the public and private sectors should be held by women<sup>4</sup>.

##### 3.1.3 The African Union's (AU) Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA)

The AU-SDGEA recognizes the low levels of women's representation in social, economic and political decision-making structures and reaffirms to expand and accelerate efforts to promote gender equality at all levels for the women in Africa.

##### 3.1.4 The African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa

The Charter was adopted by the African Union in Maputo on the 11th July, 2003. Despite Zambia making significant progress in promoting the rights of girls and

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<sup>3</sup> [https://archive.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/Beijing25/zambia-beijing25\\_report.pdf](https://archive.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/Beijing25/zambia-beijing25_report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://extranet.sadc.int/files/2112/9794/9109/SADC\\_PROTOCOL\\_ON\\_GENDER\\_AND\\_DEVELOPMENT.pdf](https://extranet.sadc.int/files/2112/9794/9109/SADC_PROTOCOL_ON_GENDER_AND_DEVELOPMENT.pdf)

women, the country continues to lag behind in meeting the aspired benchmarks in the signed declarations.

## 3.2 National Context

At the national level, the various international commitments, already highlighted, have been translated and integrated into various laws and policies which seek to address the role of women in decision making. The following are some of the national level undertakings on gender.

### 3.2.1 The Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) Act, 2016

The Zambian Constitution embedded some critical and progressive provisions on gender equality. For instance, the Constitution acknowledges that every citizen, man or woman, has equal rights to participate in, determine, and build a sustainable political, legal, and socio-economic order freely<sup>5</sup>.

### 3.2.2 Gender Equity and Equality Act No. 22 of 2015

The enactment of the Gender Equity and Equality Act No. 22 of 2015, strengthens the legal framework for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls. Section 24 (1) of the Act ensures the **equal participation of both sexes in decision making** by formulating and implementing policies, strategies and programs' that will enhance equal representation and participation<sup>6</sup>.

## 4 POLICY FRAMEWORK

### 4.1 The National Gender Policy

To make progress towards achieving the 50/50 gender parity benchmark, Zambia has reviewed its policies and national planning strategies to make them more gender-responsive. Therefore, in reducing developmental inequalities under the National Development Planning (NDP) processes, the Government remains committed in implementing interventions that will address issues related to the participation of women in decisions making positions at all levels of governance.

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<https://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/documents/acts/The%20Gender%20Equity%20and%20Equality%20Bill%2C%202015.pdf>

In this regard, the Government put in place the National Gender Policy in 2012 which was formulated in 2014. The Policy addresses gender imbalances and rests on the principle that women and men are equal in all respects, differentiated only by their physical and biological traits<sup>7</sup>. It further stipulates a 30% national gender parity benchmark, which the country has failed to attain at all levels of governance.

## 5 REPRESENTATION OF GENDER IN GOVERNANCE POSITIONS

Despite promising progress in equal representation of women and men in different governance positions, women's participation in decision-making positions at all levels remains low. The fact that gender inequalities continue to exist in all sectors at all levels, has negative implications on national development. The low representation further brings into question whether the national policies on gender are sound and effective enough to address gender disparities and attain the SADC benchmark.

### 5.1 Representation of Women at various levels of Governance

A quick assessment of the representation of women in key decision-making institutions of the Government in Zambia shows more men occupy decision making positions the women continue to be on the sidelines. This is despite there being a clear policy and legal framework on gender.

#### 5.1.1 Female representation in the Cabinet and at the National Assembly

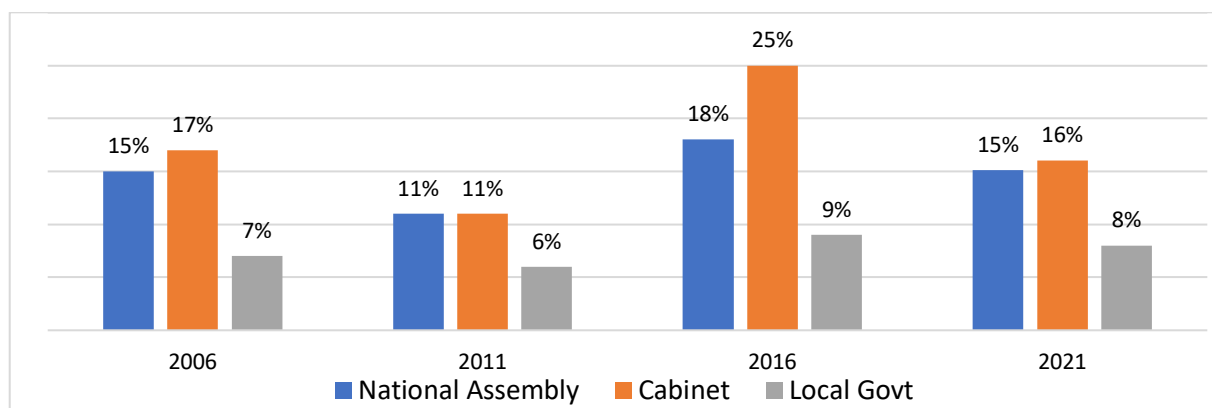
National Gender disparities exist at both the National Assembly and the Executive at the national and sub-national levels of Government. This can be attested by the fact that women representation is **even** below the modest 30% benchmark stipulated in the National Gender Policy. As shown in Figure 4 below, female representation in public offices is lowest at local Government where women only account for a meagre 8% of the positions.

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<sup>7</sup> [Zambia NationalGenderPolicy 2014.pdf](#)



Figure 4: Representation of Women at different levels of Government



Source: Key Informant Interview (KII) with Local Government Association of Zambia Staff

Female representation at Cabinet level declined from a 15 year high of 25% in 2016 to 16% in 2021. During this period, the number of female Cabinet Ministers declined from eight to four. This follows a corresponding decline share of females elected and nominated to the National Assembly from 18% in 2016 to 15% in 2021.

Zambia’s share of seats occupied by women at the National Assembly has remained below 20% since the 2006 General elections. This electoral outcome places Zambia below the SADC and global average of 24% per cent. Compared to other countries in region, Rwanda had the highest proportion of seats held by women (55%) while South Africa (46%) and Mozambique (42%) were the other countries with a high proportion.

Further, despite Botswana being a middle-income country and having 91% of women having at least attained secondary education, the share seats in Parliament held by women is a paltry 10%.<sup>8</sup> This also indicates that improving women participation required more than the provision of education.

While the overall representation of women at Local Government remains low, the number and share of women holding key positions increased between 2016 and 2021. The number of female Mayors increased from 2 (12%) to 5 (26%) while the number of female Council Chairpersons also increased from 7 (7%) to 10 (12%) as shown in Table 1.

<sup>8</sup> <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/BWA>

Table 1 Representation of women at various levels of Governance

	2016 Elections			2021 Elections		
	No. Of men	No. of women	% Women	No. Of men	No. Of women	% Women
Councilors	1516	126	9%	1718	140	8%
Mayors	15	2	12%	14	5	26%
Council Chairpersons	93	7	7%	87	10	12%
National Assembly	167	30	18%	139	25	15%
Presidential elections candidates	16	1	6%	16	1	6%

Source: Local Government Association of Zambia (LGAZ) and Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ).

The relatively smaller share of women at National Assembly and Local Government level can be attributed to the following among other reasons:

- i. Vestiges of the patriarchal system where women were subservient
- ii. Absence of enforceable laws to compel political parties to include more women in their electoral processes;
- iii. General capacity gaps among women as portrayed by the educational attainments;
- iv. Inadequate access to financial resources to enable females to enter the political scene and to compete fairly with their male counterparts<sup>9</sup>.
- v. The promulgation of minimum educational attainment laws for seekers of public office particularly disadvantages the female politicians generally have a lower educational attainment.

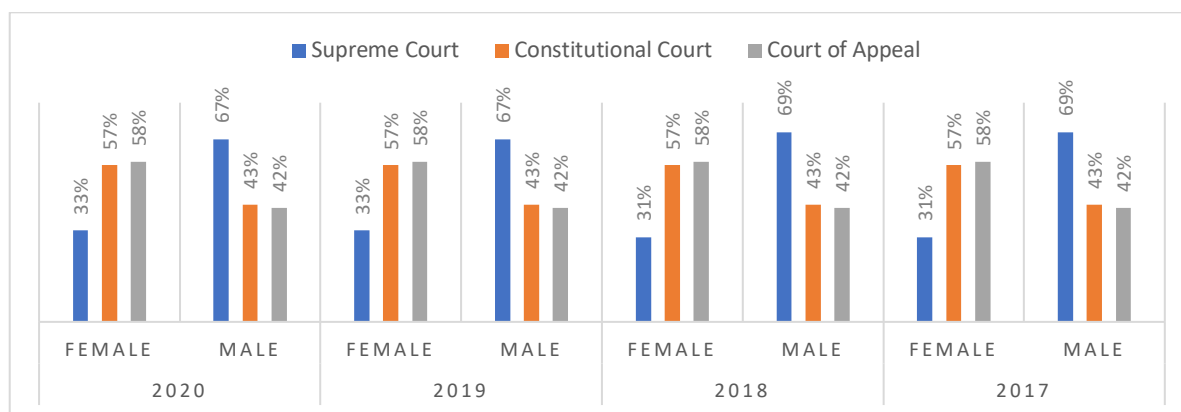
### 5.1.2 Representation of Women in the Judiciary

The importance of equal representation of women and men in the judiciary cannot be overemphasized as it has the potential to lead to greater access to justice in a country like Zambia. The judiciary plays a critical role in determining how the law is interpreted and administered in protecting the rights of every person or group of people, regardless of sex, age and nationality, inter alia. Therefore, it is critical that men and women are equally represented in positions of influence and decision-making in judicial system too, to address any perceived gender biases.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/april-2019-july-2019/african-women-politics-miles-go-parity-achieved>

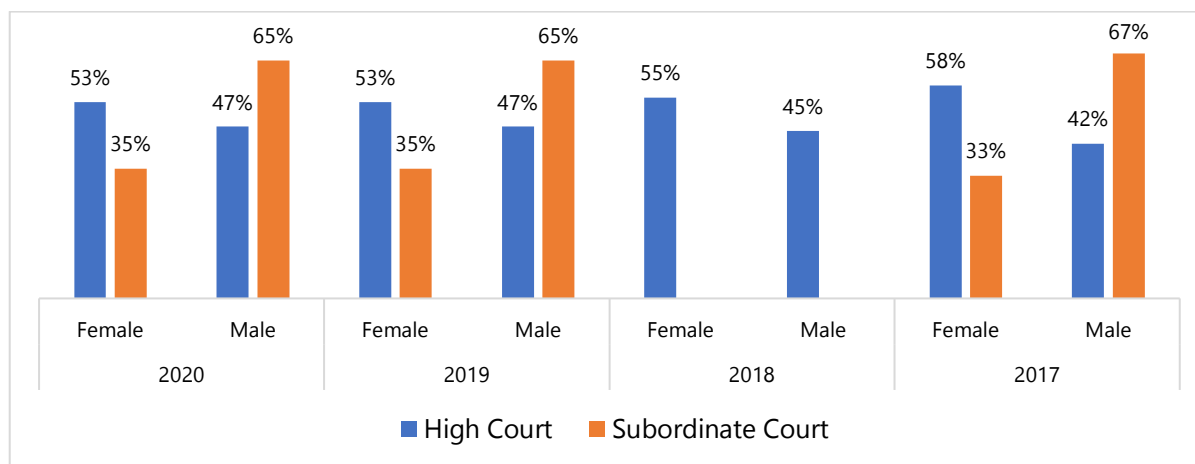
Figure 5: Judiciary Representation – Supreme Court, Constitutional Court and Court of Appeal



Source: Constructed using data from <https://judiciaryzambia.com/women-in-the-judiciary-2014-2018/>

Figures 5 and 6 reveal that women are fairly well represented in the Judiciary system. Figure 5 shows that at the highest levels, women accounted for one third (33%) of Supreme Court judges in 2020. The situation has barely changed from the 2017 where women accounted for 31%. The Constitutional Court is more balanced with women constituting the majority (57%) of the judges. Similarly, the Court of Appeal has a higher female representation at 58% of all the judges there. Further, historically, only one woman has held the position of Chief Justice.

Figure 6: Judiciary Representation – High Court and Subordinate Court



Source: Constructed using data from <https://judiciaryzambia.com/women-in-the-judiciary-2014-2018/>

As shown in Figure 6, women representation is high at High Court level compared to the Subordinate Courts. At high court level, women on average accounted for 55% of judges while they only accounted on average for 34% of the judicial positions in the Subordinate Courts.

## 6 GENDER PERFORMANCE MEASURES

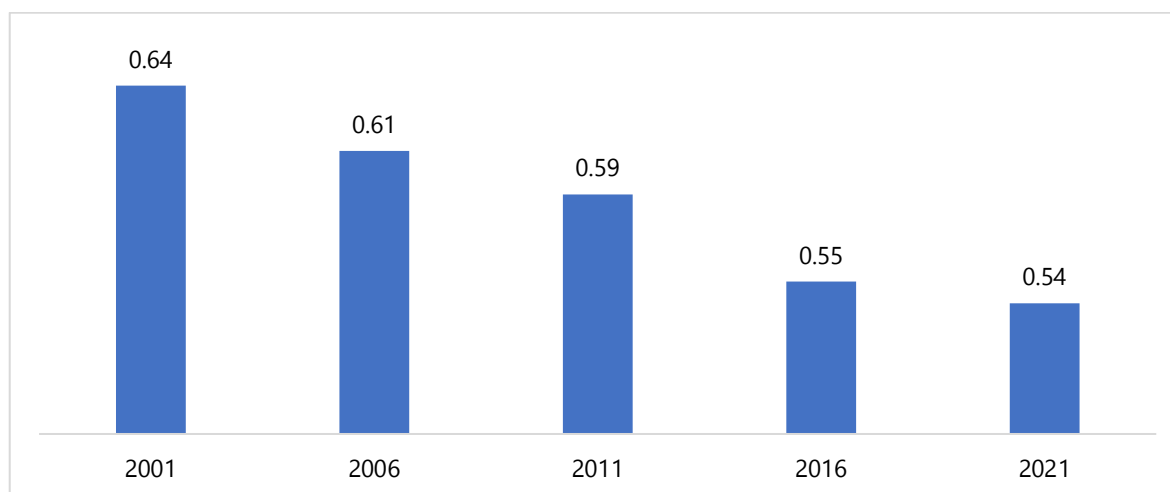
In view of the cross-cutting nature of gender, the United Nations and other institutions have designed key gender performance indicators to assess gender mainstreaming and, women's empowerment and progress<sup>10</sup>. These have been adopted by the Government as standard metrics for assessing human development from the lens of gender inclusion in Zambia. Some are elaborated as follows;

### 6.1 Gender Inequality Index (GII)

The Gender Inequality Index (GII) measures the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements. The GII is measured in three dimensions including:

- i. Reproductive health- (measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates),
- ii. Empowerment- (shares of parliamentary seats held and population with at least some secondary education by each gender, and labor market<sup>11</sup>).
- iii. Labor market participation- which is measured by the labor force participation rates for women and men.

Figure 7: Gender Inequality Index (GII)



Source: UNDP Human Development Index

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/cdpmo/tools/2022/portal-minimum-set-gender-indicators>

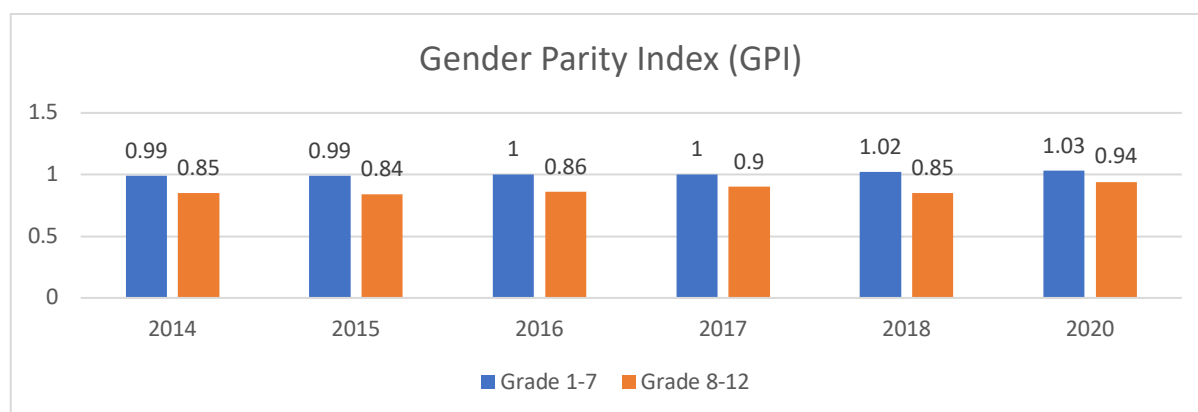
<sup>11</sup> <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/ZMB>  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?locations=ZG>

The GII value ranges between 0 and 1, closer to 0 indicating that women and men fare equally, while 1 indicating complete inequality. Figure 7 reveals a marginal improvement of Zambia's GII over the years, however, the country is ranked 138 out of 170 countries globally. In Africa, Rwanda has one of the best GII values of 0.38 compared to Zambia's 0.54.

## 6.2 The Gender Parity Index (GPI)

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) assesses the level of participation of women and men in a particular development taking. In this case, it is the ratio of female to male pupils. A GPI lower than one (1) means that there are more males than females attending school, while a GPI greater than one indicates equal attendance by both males and females. Further, as Zambia's demographic profile highlights a higher number of females than males in the population, a GPI slightly higher than one is desirable i.e., more females than males attending school<sup>12</sup>.

Figure 8: Gender Parity Index (GPI)



Source: Education Statistics Bulletin 2020

As shown in Figure 8, the GPI at primary level has been one and slightly above since 2016, signifying equal school attendance by both males and females. In recent years, a GPI greater than one implies that more females than males attended primary school. However, at secondary school GPI has consistently been below one indicating a higher attendance for male pupils compared to females. Hence, the occurrence of a funnel effect that sees girls being sieved out as they get to secondary school.

The reasons for the funnel effect at secondary level include teenage pregnancy, child marriage, and limited access to menstrual hygiene amenities, harmful cultural practices

<sup>12</sup> [EDUCATION STATISTICS BULLETIN 2020-14-09-22 \(1\).pdf](#)

and limited school infrastructure. This has a direct effect on obtaining a tertiary education for females in that, men are more likely to be enrolled as they have higher access.

## 7 CONCLUSION.

Zambia's legal and policy framework indicate that the country remains committed to making progress towards achieving gender equality and equity especially if it is to achieve middle income status. However, the participation of women in decision making remains low, women hold fewer political positions, have less access to education and have lower labor force participation rates despite account for half of the Zambian population.

The Judiciary is an ideal example as women are fairly represented in key positions over the years. However, there are still significant gaps in increasing women participation in political office. While there are policy and legal option to increase participation, the starting point must be to address the underlying issues which relate to low access to education.

## 8 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Enhance policy and legislation to compel gender balancing.** Key decision-making positions in Government and the Judiciary are either through appointment or nomination, this implies that gender balance can be achieved by compelling the appointing authority through legislation to mainstream gender. Similarly, political parties must be compelled to achieve gender balance in the adoption of candidates at intra party elections and in running for public office.
2. **Address Infrastructure gaps in education to increase opportunities for girls.** Currently, there is only one secondary school for every 9 primary schools. The limited school infrastructure has limited opportunities for girls who are already disadvantaged by the patriarchal systems and yet still have to compete for available places with boys. Thus, investing in education infrastructure is critical for the relaxation of the basic hurdle to participation in education.

3. **Enhance educational support for girls at higher levels of the education system.**  
Bursaries must be made more accessible to girls at secondary and tertiary levels to prevent dropout rates. This will ultimately encourage girls to complete their secondary and progress to tertiary level and eventually increase their labor force participation rate.