30 Women in Local Government: Celebrating CLGF's 30th Anniversary

Featured Interviewee #23: Marie Cristelle Pondard

Lord Mayor of Port Louis, Mauritius



Profile

Marie Cristelle Pondard is currently the Lord Mayor of Port Louis, the capital city of Mauritius. She was elected as a municipal councillor in May 2025, representing Ward 3, and was elected Lord Mayor in May 2026.

Mrs Pondard is dedicated to building a more inclusive, sustainable and dynamic Port Louis. Her priorities include improving the urban environment, strengthening citizen participation, supporting local initiatives and preserving the city's cultural and historical heritage while embracing modern development. She believes that effective local government plays a vital role in improving the quality of life and creating vibrant and resilient communities.

Mrs Pondard values the importance of women's leadership and participation in local government. She places emphasis on listening to citizens, responding to community needs and fostering collaboration among local stakeholders. Cooperation and the sharing of experiences among cities and local governments are essential to building stronger communities and a more sustainable future.

Marie Cristelle Pondard
Lord Mayor of Port Louis
Mauritius

Interview Highlights

1. How has the role of women in local government evolved over the past three decades, and how do you think women can accelerate action for gender equality today?

The role of women in local government has evolved significantly. Women are taking visible leadership roles and they are contributing to shaping policies, services and the development of our communities. Women are able to bring valuable perspectives and experiences to local government, especially in areas related to families and communities. We need to create an environment where women have equal opportunities to lead, participate meaningfully in decision-making and progress in their careers.

Women can accelerate action for gender equality by supporting and empowering one another, by mentoring younger women and by speaking up in decision-making spaces. At the same time, men, institutions and communities must also be active partners in removing barriers and challenging stereotypes. Gender equality means that every woman and girl should be given the opportunity to contribute, lead and realise her potential. Stronger participation of women in local government ultimately means stronger, more inclusive and more representative communities.

2. What inspired you to enter local government, and how has your journey advanced gender equality in your community or country?

My decision to enter local government was driven by the desire to contribute to the well-being and development of my community. I believe that meaningful change begins at the local level, where elected representatives are closest to citizens and can understand their needs, concerns and aspirations. My journey in local government began as a Municipal Councillor of Port Louis, and I now have the honour and privilege of serving as Lord Mayor. This experience has reinforced my belief that women have an important role to play in shaping our communities.

As a woman in leadership, I hope to contribute through decision-making and also by demonstrating that women can lead, serve and make a meaningful difference in public life. In Port Louis, I find it important to listen to citizens' opinions, encourage participation and create opportunities for women and young people to become more involved in the life of our city.

3. What has been your most rewarding experience as a woman leader in local government, and how did it contribute to promoting gender equality?

One of the most rewarding aspects as a woman leader in local government has been the opportunity to engage directly with the people of Port Louis and to see how local leadership can make a meaningful difference in their lives. I have been able to listen to citizens from different backgrounds, understand their concerns and work towards solutions that respond to the needs of our communities. As woman leaders, we should encourage people, including women and young people, to believe that their voices matter and that they too can contribute to the development of our city.

I am convinced that leadership is about creating opportunities for others. I hope to encourage more women to participate in civic life and to consider leadership roles at the local and national levels. If my journey can inspire another woman or young girl in Port Louis to step forward, participate and aspire to leadership, that would be one of my most rewarding achievements.

4. What challenges did you face as a woman entering local government, and how did you overcome them? What can be done to accelerate overcoming these barriers for future women leaders?

Entering local government as a woman can come with challenges, mainly in an environment that has traditionally been male dominated. Women may also have to work harder to have their voices heard, overcome preconceived expectations about leadership, or balance public responsibilities with family and other commitments.

My approach as Lord Mayor is to remain focused on the purpose of public service, to listen, learn and engage constructively with people, while having the confidence to contribute my ideas and stand by the principles I believe in. Perseverance, collaboration and authenticity are important qualities in leadership.

To accelerate progress for future women leaders, opportunities should be created, such as leadership and mentoring programmes, greater access to networks and training, supportive institutional environments and measures that make it easier for women to balance professional and family responsibilities. We also need to change attitudes within society and ensure that men are active partners in promoting equality.

5. What advice would you give to other women considering a career in local government to help them accelerate gender equality in their communities?

My advice is that any woman considering a career in local government should believe in her ability to make a difference. Local government is about people. It gives us the opportunity to listen to our communities, to understand their needs and turn ideas into actions that can improve everyday life. Women bring perspectives, experiences and strengths to this work, and our communities benefit when those voices are represented.

I would encourage women to be courageous, to learn continuously, to build strong networks and to remain true to themselves. Do not be discouraged by challenges or by the fact that leadership spaces may sometimes feel unfamiliar. Every woman who steps forward helps to make the path easier for those who follow. Gender equality will accelerate when more women participate, lead and support one another, but also when men and institutions work alongside them.

6. How can we encourage more women, particularly young women, to enter leadership roles in local government, and what actions can governments take to create more inclusive environments for women?

Young women can be encouraged to enter local government if we make leadership visible, accessible and meaningful to them. They need to see that their ideas can have a real impact on their communities. In Port Louis, this means creating more opportunities for young people to engage with the municipality, to participate in community initiatives and understand how local government works. Mentorship programmes, youth leadership initiatives, internships and opportunities to participate in civic projects can help young women develop confidence, skills and an understanding of public service from an early stage.

Governments also have an important responsibility to create inclusive working environments. This includes transparent and equal opportunities for advancement, leadership and training programmes, supportive workplace policies, and mechanisms to address discrimination and harassment. It also means ensuring that women's voices are genuinely included in consultations and decision-making processes.

7. Why is it urgent to increase the number and influence of women in local government, and how will this contribute to positive change in governance?

Women are an integral part of our communities, and their voices and experiences should be reflected in the decisions that shape those communities. Local government has a direct impact on people's everyday lives, from the urban environment and public spaces to community services, youth opportunities and local economic development. When women participate meaningfully in these decisions, a wider range of experiences and perspectives can be brought to the table. This can contribute to policies and services that are more responsive to the diverse needs of citizens.

Gender equality in local government is about ensuring that women have a meaningful voice in shaping the future of their communities. More inclusive leadership can strengthen public trust, encourage broader participation and contribute to more responsive, representative and people-centred governance.

8. How has digital technology helped or can help accelerate women's political inclusion in local government, and what steps should we take to make it more accessible to women in leadership?

Digital technology has created new opportunities for women to participate in public life. It allows women leaders to communicate directly with communities, share information, listen to citizens and advocate for issues that matter to them. Digital platforms can help us bring local government closer to citizens by making consultations, information and community initiatives more accessible. They can also give women greater visibility and opportunities to contribute to civic discussions and leadership.

Digital technology should be a tool for empowerment by helping women to be more visible, more connected to their communities and more actively involved in decision-making. If we combine digital inclusion with supportive policies and safe online environments, technology can help open new pathways for the next generation of women leaders. Women should be able to use digital spaces without being subjected to intimidation or discrimination.

9. What innovative practices or strategies have you used to accelerate women's participation and leadership in local government in your region or country?

I believe that accelerating women's participation in local government begins with creating opportunities for women to engage directly with their city. Strengthening the dialogue between the municipality and our communities is one of the strategies used, so that citizens, including women, can express their views and contribute ideas.

I also believe in the power of mentorship and role models. When women see other women taking on responsibilities in public life, it helps demonstrate that leadership is within their reach. As a woman leader, I see part of my responsibility as encouraging young women to develop their confidence, participate in civic initiatives and consider public service as a meaningful career and vocation.

I also encourage the involvement of young people in community projects, leadership initiatives and discussions about the future of Port Louis. We need a new generation of citizens who are confident in contributing to public life.

10. As CLGF celebrates 30 years, what actions must be taken in the next 30 years to ensure the continued empowerment of women in local government?

I believe the next 30 years must be about moving from greater representation to genuine equality in leadership and decision-making. We need to continue creating clear pathways for women to enter, progress and lead in local government. This means investing in leadership development, mentorship and networking, particularly for young women, and ensuring that women have equal access to training, opportunities and decision-making spaces.

We must also create local government institutions that are genuinely inclusive. Supportive workplace policies, safe working environments, equal opportunities for advancement and measures that enable women to balance professional and family responsibilities are essential. We must address discrimination, harassment and any barrier that discourage women from remaining in public life. We must ensure that women have the skills, connectivity and confidence to benefit from the power of technology and digital platforms which can make civic participation more dynamic and more accessible.

CLGF 30th Anniversary Commemoration

In celebration of CLGF's 30th Anniversary, we are honoured to spotlight the inspiring stories of 30 trailblazing women in local government from across the Commonwealth, all members of the Commonwealth Women in Local Government Network. These interviews celebrate their groundbreaking contributions to gender equality and their transformative impact on building inclusive, empowered communities.

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