

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

Featured Interviewee #22: Naemi Ndinelao Amuthemu

Mayor of Ongwediva and President of ALAN, Namibia



Profile

Naemi Ndinelao Amuthemu is the Mayor of Ongwediva and President of the Association

for Local Authorities in Namibia (ALAN). She also serves as Chairperson of the Triumphant College Ongwediva Campus Advisory Board, a Trustee of the Retirement Fund for Local Authorities and Utility Services in Namibia (RFLAUN), and a Director of the Northern Regional Electricity Distributor (NORED).

In addition to her local government and institutional leadership roles, Mayor Amuthemu is actively involved in the SWAPO Party. She serves as a District Coordinator of the SWAPO Party Women's Council and is a member of both the Women's Council Central Committee and the SWAPO Party Central Committee. Through these varied responsibilities, she contributes to local governance, women's political participation, institutional oversight and community development in Namibia.

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Mayor of Ongwediva
President of Association for Local Authorities in Namibia (ALAN)
Namibia

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?

Over the past three decades, women's role in local government has changed significantly - from being underrepresented in decision-making to serving as councillors, mayors and community leaders. Before independence, women in Namibia had few opportunities to participate in leadership. After independence, women returning from exile helped inspire others to assume local political leadership. Affirmative action, political mobilisation and advocacy, including the adoption of the zebra-style approach, have since expanded women's representation. Today, women and men are equally represented in Namibia's local government. Women are not simply occupying seats; they are helping to shape decisions on social progress and economic development.

To accelerate equality, experienced women leaders must intentionally mentor and prepare young women, create pathways into politics and local leadership, and secure budgets for capacity-building. Political parties and local authorities must also reject harassment, intimidation and violence against



women in politics. In Namibia, women leaders should spearhead action to prevent gender-based violence. We will advance gender equality by leading boldly, demonstrating competence and accountability, and ensuring that younger women can speak, compete and lead safely.

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

I entered local government because I believe development cannot succeed through a purely top-down approach; it must begin at the grassroots. I wanted to participate directly in decisions that improve people's lives and ensure that women's voices were heard.

I joined local government in 2016 as Chairperson of the Management Committee, where I advocated stronger representation of women and girls in local decision-making bodies. I also wanted my own performance to demonstrate that women can lead and deliver effectively.

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

My most rewarding experience has been developing the ability to identify community needs and make relevant, responsive decisions that improve people's quality of life, especially the lives of women and children. Meeting women leaders at regional and international levels has also strengthened my own leadership and shown me the value of shared experience.

My greatest reward is inspiring other women to gain confidence and make independent choices about their personal lives, families, careers and finances. I try to be a visible role model and to create an inclusive environment in which women can realise their rights and use their abilities fully. I have also supported programmes that provide businesses with a framework for advancing gender equality.

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?

When I entered local government, leadership and decision-making were still widely seen as the domain of men. Community attitudes and long-standing stereotypes caused some people to underestimate my ability, so I felt I had to work harder to earn the same recognition and respect.

I responded by continually strengthening my skills, building my confidence, speaking firmly on issues that mattered and demonstrating leadership through results. Supportive relationships with other women and colleagues also helped me. Women who are given the opportunity to lead have a responsibility to perform well, open doors for others and remove the barriers they faced, so that each new generation does not have to fight the same battles.

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

Believe in your ability to lead, be courageous and take opportunities even when you do not feel completely ready. Keep building your knowledge, confidence and leadership skills so that you can participate fully in decision-making. Local government shapes the services and policies that affect families every day, and women's voices belong in that process.



Build networks and support other women. We advance gender equality faster when women open doors for one another rather than compete against each other. Women must make sure they are around the table, not on the menu. When given the opportunity, lead with integrity, accountability and a commitment to service, and help the women and girls coming after you to believe that they, too, can lead.

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?

We must create clear entry points for young women, build their confidence and prepare them through leadership training, mentoring and practical experience. Community development committees can give young women early opportunities to serve as leaders, while successful women leaders should be recognised publicly so that others can see what is possible.

Governments should budget for these programmes, monitor women's participation and uphold equal representation in local government. They should also enforce strong policies against gender-based violence, harassment, discrimination and systemic inequality, and ensure that women are represented not only in elected seats but also in senior managerial positions.

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?

Increasing the number and influence of women is urgent because local government is the public authority closest to everyday life, responsible for daily services, community welfare and local democracy. Women make up a substantial share of Namibia's population and must have an equal voice in shaping public policy.

When women participate meaningfully, governance becomes more inclusive and responsive to the whole population. Issues such as education, health care, childcare, safety, economic empowerment and social protection receive stronger attention. Women's economic participation also supports investment in family education, health and community wellbeing. Gender equality challenges discrimination and strengthens governance by making ability and commitment, rather than gender, the basis for leadership.

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 can be a powerful accelerator of women's political inclusion. It helps women research community needs, communicate with residents and stakeholders, and connect with women leaders, mentors and peers across communities and countries. Virtual meetings and online networks make it easier to exchange ideas, share good practices and sustain mentorship.

Access, however, must include more than connectivity. Women need digital skills, reliable information, confidence and protection from cyberbullying and exploitation. Technology should help women reach the platforms where nation-building decisions are made, not expose them to new forms of abuse.



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

My approach combines advocacy, confidence-building and practical preparation. I speak to women about their rights and the importance of local government, particularly encouraging young women to see it as a space where their voices and ideas can advance community development.

I have sought out people with strong local government expertise and brought in facilitators to build women's knowledge, so that when they receive leadership opportunities they can translate policy into tangible services and strengthen local democracy. I also keep women informed about available leadership positions and encourage them to contest those positions, helping to increase their numbers and amplify their voices progressively.

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?

The next 30 years will require intentional and sustained action by governments, political parties, community organisations, businesses, the private sector and development partners. We must strengthen laws and policies that guarantee women equal opportunities in leadership, implement and closely monitor 50/50 representation, and increase women's presence in both elected and administrative positions.

We must also invest in girls' education, women's skills development and digital literacy, while advancing women's economic empowerment. Financial independence strengthens women's ability to participate and lead effectively. Ultimately, local government and national development will benefit fully when the talents, perspectives and contributions of both women and men are valued equally

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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