

## MAYOR GERALDINE LENDOR – GABRIEL, ST LUCIA, (CARIBBEAN/THE AMERICAS)



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*Geraldine Lendor – Gabriel is the Mayor of Castries in St. Lucia in the Caribbean.*

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### **What made you decide to enter local government?**

Local government agencies are in contact with people in the most direct way and can impact most areas of their lives and all age groups. They receive demands, claims, and complaints from residents, while developing and enacting policies that directly affect lives. The recognition that to whom much is given, much is expected, made me recognise that this would serve as a very effective area for me to work with others to effect changes in the daily lives of my fellow Saint Lucians. It is, and continues to be the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the critical role in addressing the political and social challenges of the pandemic.

### **What has been your most rewarding experience as a councillor/leader/local government practitioner?**

The operational improvements, especially in the areas of revenue collection and community engagement activities which has, and continues to result in enhanced value added to residents and vendors. Importantly, a number of *comfort stations* and community facilities were in a state of disrepair and, within less than one year, there have been significant enhancements noted. There has also been substantial work undertaken which will result in the implementation of a parking terminal which may be the first in the Caribbean. This project had been in the pipeline for over ten years and, with the efforts of this new council, we believe that by June 2023, significant progress towards its realisation will result in its implementation.

### **What advice would you give to other women considering entering local government?**

Serving at the local government level is a vocation that calls for personal sacrifice, empathy and remaining connected to the communities we serve. It is therefore important that, in spite of the challenges we face, we harness the required political and financial resources to meet the needs of residents. This requires honest and sustained efforts, as well as piloting of initiatives which will create new spaces for dialogue both at the local, regional and international level. This is critical to allow for an exchange of experience and

varying viewpoints among residents, and local government agencies, as well as regional and international stakeholders, so as to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and strengthened capacity to deliver on their mandate. Importantly, we cannot be thin-skinned about criticism as honest feedback is the first step towards sustained improvements over time.

### **Why do you think it is important to increase the number and voice of women in local government?**

Women make up at least fifty percent of the society and whilst the basic needs of men and women are essentially the same, women play a critical role in sustaining the social fabric of our society. They are therefore important partners who must have adequate representation at the level of government closest to citizens, i.e. local government. Their involvement will not only assist in nurturing a more equitable society but it will play a vital role in addressing gender inequality and in building the capacities of women to more meaningfully contribute to social and economic development by involving them in local decision-making, planning and management. If people are alienated from the decision-making process which influences their lives, then the decisions including policies and laws will be inconsistent with their needs and viewpoint, this will inevitably negatively impact the democratic system in a country. Women's reproductive health is a very good example of an issue they can best decide upon. Therefore, women's participation at the decision-making level is critical to ensure meaningful, mass participation in the governance of a country and gender sensitive decisions, thus leading to greater social and economic inclusion, stability and prosperity.

### **As a woman, what has been your biggest hurdle in becoming a councillor – and in your daily public life?**

The biggest hurdle has been balancing family life with my role as Mayor. I have two teenage sons and must ensure that I address their needs on a daily basis. They must be taught to recognise that there may be criticism of their mom but that is part of respecting variations in points of view, as well as continuous growth and improvement. In addition, ensuring that their educational needs are met and adequately supported would not have been possible without the strong family that I have, especially a supportive and focused husband who ably provides the support and, in so doing, ensures that the needs of the boys are met. There is the recognition, however, that children need both parents and, as such, I constantly seek to juggle this role.

### **What has helped you the most to continue in your role?**

The support of the Minister of Local Government, Mr Richard Fredrick, as well as Permanent Secretary, Dr Curdelia Lane Ambrose in the Ministry of Local Government, has been a key enabler in effectively ensuring that the council remains focused and delivers on its mandate. This involves advocating for resources, as well as helping in strengthening important strategic partnerships. The fact that our focus and philosophy of putting people first is well aligned means that the relationship with national government and the local government agency - the council - is well aligned. In addition, they have been able to effectively advocate for resources when needed to support our work programme.

## **As a councillor/leader in your community, how can digital technology be used to increase women's political inclusion?**

The use of digital technology is critical in all areas of the council operations and its increased use will contribute to operational effectiveness and efficiency. The areas of crime fighting and increased accountability for revenue collection, as well as enhanced ability to provide services will significantly increase the effectiveness of C councils. In the area of political inclusion, it can be used to transmit credible, enlightening information to residents, including women. It could also be used to mobilise women leaders, highlighting their achievements and commitment and, in so doing, assist in the election of credible and effective women leaders.