

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

### Featured Interviewee #7: Lord Mayor Rohey Malick Lowe

Mayor of City of Banjul, The Gambia



#### Profile

**Lord Mayor Rohey Malick Lowe** made history in 2018 as the first female mayor of Banjul, the capital city of The Gambia, and was re-elected in 2023—becoming the first mayor in the capital city to serve a second term. A founding member of the United Democratic Party, she is known for her inclusive leadership and strong

international presence. Educated in Sweden in International Relations, she served on the Child Welfare Committee of Nyköping Municipality.

Mayor Lowe is a successful entrepreneur and a passionate advocate for women's and youth empowerment, sustainable development, and active civic participation. She holds leadership roles including President of the Network of the Elected Women Leaders in Africa, known by its French acronym REFELA; Second Vice President of the United Democratic Party, and 2nd Vice Chair of the Global Parliament of Mayors. She is the founder of the Rohey Malick Lowe Women and Girls Empowerment Initiative and has received multiple international awards such as the UN Habitat Special Citation – For advancing women's rights; Global Parliament of Mayors' Dr. Benjamin Barber Global Cities Award; African Woman of the Year 2024 and the Woman Champion of the year 2025. She is fluent in English, Swedish, Mandinka, and Wolof, she is a prominent youth mentor and political voice.

***Lord Mayor Rohey Malick Lowe***

Mayor of City of Banjul, The Gambia

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### 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 involvement of women in local government has increased significantly over the past decade, with more women holding leadership roles and making meaningful change. However, barriers such as stereotyping, bullying, and lack of policy implementation persist.

Rohey Malick Lowe (The Gambia)



Governments often ratify protocols like the Maputo Protocol but fail to implement them effectively. To accelerate gender equality, there must be stronger enforcement of these laws, a shift in policies—especially in the media—and pressure from both local and international actors to create safer, more inclusive spaces for women in politics.

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

Although I come from a political family, my real journey began through advocacy during my time in High School and later travels to Sweden, where I was active in politics with the Social Democrats Party and was nominated as a councillor. Swedish politics deeply inspired me—especially their commitment to gender equality. I later joined the United Democratic Party in the Gambia in 1996 to challenge the dictatorship in The Gambia through democratic means.

Returning home after His Excellency President Adama Barrow was elected in a democratic way, I saw how poor infrastructure and traditional norms kept women confined to domestic roles. Motivated by what I had seen in Sweden, I ran for mayor to change that mindset and ensure women had a place in leadership.

Since being elected, I've integrated women and girls into the city's budget, offered scholarships, led mentorship programmes, and conducted advocacy to help women understand their rights. I also brought water access to communities, linking economic independence to empowerment. These efforts have helped more women enter local government and become part of the change.

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

Two initiatives stand out: providing scholarships for girls to attend university and leading the *Water for Women* project. Access to water has empowered women economically and socially, enabling them to earn income, gain confidence, and say “no” to violence against women. These initiatives support multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and give women the tools to claim their rights and influence decisions.

## **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 was difficult due to lack of financial backing, gender bias, and weak institutional support. International organizations often only show up *after* women are elected, not when support is most needed.

Rohey Malick Lowe (The Gambia)



I overcame these barriers through persistence, community outreach, and focusing on my goals. I emphasize *solidarity over sympathy*—women must support each other. Most lack financial assets like land or property, which limits access to campaign resources. To advance, women need pre-election support, funding, and trust from institutions to lead advocacy initiatives early in the process.

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

First, believe in yourself. Understand that women are essential leaders—kingmakers. Take education seriously, but know that even without formal education, women can lead.

Communicate in the languages you know best, so your message is clear. Practice mentorship, share knowledge, and always verify information. Confidence, education, clarity, and solidarity are key to breaking barriers and driving gender equality.

**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?**

Introducing a quota system is essential to increase women's participation in local elections. Political parties also need to support more women candidates, rather than overwhelmingly favouring men. Alongside quotas, policies must be introduced to protect women and girls from bullying and stereotyping in political spaces.

**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 understand community issues deeply and often think ahead for others, including men. In democracies where women form the majority of the population, their underrepresentation means the minority is effectively in control. Countries with more women at decision-making tables tend to experience better development outcomes, highlighting the need for greater gender balance in 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 accelerates access to information, facilitates networking, and simplifies mentorship. It helps women learn, connect, and organize more effectively. However, supportive policies are needed to ensure digital tools are accessible and used to empower women in leadership.

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

Community outreach has been key—through town hall meetings, engagement with influential women, and connecting with mentors such as former leaders. Participation in networks like REFELA has also supported women's empowerment by fostering collaboration and visibility.

Rohey Malick Lowe (The Gambia)



**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?**

Policy reform is critical—introducing and implementing quota systems and enforcing protocols that support women’s leadership. Commitments made at the international level must be translated into national laws and actions to create real change.

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**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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