

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

### Featured Interviewee #13: Hon. Ontiretse Tryphinah Bogatsu

Council Chairperson, Tlokweng District Council, Botswana



#### Profile

**Hon. Ontiretse T. Bogatsu** is a pioneering force for women in politics, making history as the first woman and second individual to serve as Council Chairperson of the Tlokweng District Council. A native of Tlokweng's Selokwana Ward, she brings a dynamic background in entrepreneurship,

blending her education in Software Engineering and Business Skills with ongoing studies in Strategic Management and Leadership.

As Chairperson, she is driving the timely, high-quality completion of major district projects, including new internal roads, a Recreational and Convention Facility, and crucial housing developments. Councillor Bogatsu is committed to elevating community services, specifically Clinical Health, Environmental Health, and Education.

She leads with integrity, prioritizing community interests, fostering unity among stakeholders, and championing the transformation of Tlokweng into a vibrant economic hub with an improved quality of life for all.

#### **Hon. Ontiretse Tryphinah Bogatsu**

**Council** Chairperson, Tlokweng District Council, Botswana

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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?

Over the past three decades, women's roles in local government have significantly advanced globally, spurred by initiatives like the Beijing Platform for Action. This progress is highly visible in **Tlokweng**, Botswana. Between 2014 and 2019, women made up **40%** of elected Councillors, which rose to **50%** from 2019 to 2024. Following Tlokweng's 2024 upgrade to a district, gender parity was nearly maintained, with women constituting **47%** of the 15 Councillors. My election as the **first woman Council Chairperson** highlights this positive shift, making me the **only woman** currently holding such a leadership position among Botswana's 31 districts. Despite these strong gains, continuous effort is essential. Further steps are needed to achieve full inclusion and equity in governance, including advocating for more leadership opportunities, mentorship, and policy support for women in politics. My election as the first woman Council Chairperson highlights this positive shift, making me the only woman currently holding such a leadership position among Botswana's 31 districts. Despite these strong gains,

Hon Ontiretse Bogatsu (Botswana)



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

My inspiration to enter local government stemmed from a passion for community development and a desire to influence positive change. As a young businesswoman, I aimed to improve the ease of doing business and actively participate in decisions that directly impact citizens' lives, particularly women, children, and vulnerable groups. Stepping into the roles of Councillor and, subsequently, Chairperson provided a powerful platform to influence key development decisions. This journey has allowed me to be a strong advocate for gender equality in both government and development planning, moving our community toward greater inclusion. Crucially, my leadership not only inspires other women to pursue roles in governance but also ensures that gender considerations are integrated into the local development agenda, profoundly advancing gender equality in Tlokweng.

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

The most rewarding experience has been my election as the Chairperson of the Tlokweng District Council. This historic role immediately provided a powerful platform, allowing me to participate in influential national forums, including the Mayor's Forum, the BALA Executive Committee, the Women's League, and as a Co-op member in the Central Committee of the Umbrella for Democratic Change. Through these key platforms, I actively collaborate with other leaders to address critical development challenges, ensuring that women's voices and perspectives are consistently heard and integrated into high-level decision-making processes. My leadership serves as a tangible demonstration that women's active participation in governance is vital for shaping a more inclusive and equitable future for our community and promoting gender equality nationwide.

**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?**

A primary challenge was the dominance of men in leadership forums and persistent cultural stereotypes that favor male leaders. I frequently experienced my capabilities being underestimated and my ideas being overlooked until they were echoed by male colleagues.

Overcoming these barriers requires continuous, multi-pronged effort. I've focused on consistently advocating for policies that boost women's participation and actively providing mentorship to future women leaders. It's vital to challenge the cultural stereotypes that hinder women's advancement and increase women's visibility, influence, and access to decision-making positions. To accelerate this progress for the next generation, we need sustained awareness campaigns, strong supportive policies, and deep community engagement to shift perceptions and create a truly equitable and inclusive governance system.

**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 main advice to every woman considering a career in local government is STEP FORWARD BOLDLY - YOUR VOICE IS NEEDED! Local government is the closest arm of government to the people and women bring unique perspectives that lead to more inclusive, community centered decisions.



## **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?**

To encourage more women, particularly young women, to enter leadership roles, we must implement **mentorship and role model programs** where experienced women leaders guide and support aspirants, highlighting their **success stories** to inspire confidence. This must be complemented by the provision of **leadership training** in governance, public speaking, and public engagement for young women. Additionally, governments can introduce policies that **reserve a minimum percentage** of leadership positions for women, provide **financial support** or waive fees for female candidates, and ensure all policies and budgets are **gender-responsive** and inclusive of women's needs. Furthermore, introducing **parental or paternal leave** can help women balance professional and family roles. The government, potentially through the Ministry of Gender, must focus on **raising awareness and offering educational programs** to build women's confidence, while also encouraging **diversity and safe spaces** for dialogue, thereby enabling women to succeed as leaders.

## **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 in local government is urgent because women bring diverse perspectives, often focusing on social issues like education, healthcare, child welfare. Their leadership ensures these priorities are reflected in planning and service delivery. Given that the population of Tlokweng is 55,517, with a slight female majority, and the national trend of women are primary household caregivers, their perspectives are vital for addressing community needs. Stronger representation ensures stronger democracy as inclusive governance strengthens trust and legitimacy. Visible women leaders also inspire girls and young women to pursue leadership and public service, breaking long-standing gender barriers.

Ultimately, women in local government leadership drive laws, policies and programs that help protect women's rights, promote gender equality in budgeting and improve access to services for marginalized groups. Increasing women's participation is not just a gender issue - when women lead, communities thrive.

## **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 **greatly advanced women's political inclusion** in local government by providing crucial platforms for **advocacy, networking, and capacity-building**. This makes it easier for women to access information, participate virtually in governance, and effectively run for office. To further accelerate this progress and make digital technology more accessible to women in leadership, we must take several deliberate steps:

1. **Skills Development:** Provide comprehensive training for women on essential digital tools, cybersecurity, and communication technologies.
2. **Access and Affordability:** Establish partnerships with NGOs to ensure women, particularly in rural areas, can afford and access necessary devices and data.
3. **Safety and Security:** Develop and strictly enforce strong policies against online harassment to protect women in digital spaces.
4. **User-Friendly Design:** Ensure e-governance and political participation tools are user-friendly and accessible across all literacy levels.



5. **Promoting Tech Leadership:** Encourage women to develop or lead technology projects that specifically promote political engagement and inclusion.

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

To accelerate women's participation and leadership in my locality, I've implemented several innovative strategies. At the party level, I directly run **mentorship programs** to support and empower women aspiring to **leadership** roles. As Council Chairperson, I actively utilize **digital platforms** to engage with stakeholders, ensuring our communication is fully inclusive. In collaboration with our Member of Parliament, we have organized **targeted training sessions** to specifically build women's leadership skills. Furthermore, we are developing key partnerships with civil society and the private sector and exploring specialized **funding mechanisms** to support community development initiatives led by women. These multi-faceted approaches collectively aim to **build skills, increase representation, challenge stereotypes**, and substantially reduce the barriers women face, fostering a truly inclusive governance environment.

## 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?

Strategic action is vital, focusing on five key areas. We must enact **Legal and Policy Reform** by strengthening laws that guarantee **gender parity**, including **mandatory quotas** and anti-discrimination measures. Simultaneously, focus on **Capacity Building** by investing in continuous **leadership development** and training in essential skills like negotiation and digital literacy. We need to **enhance access to resources and networks**, facilitating women's access to financial resources, mentorship, and professional networks to boost their influence. Finally, we must promote **inclusive digital transformation** by bridging the technology divide, paired with a **Cultural Shift** - proactively **challenging social norms** and barriers through sustained community campaigns to shift perceptions about women's leadership.

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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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