



## Personal Strategies Adopted by Women Ward Councillors to Maximise Their Contribution to Decision-Making in South Africa

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v6i8.1490>

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### **Abstract**

Democratic countries have promulgating prescripts to increase the number of women in politics which has affected how local government operates. However, politics is still regarded as male-dominated in most countries including South Africa. For women councillors to survive and equally participate in the decision-making processes at the municipal level, there must be something exceptional about them as their interests differ from their male counterparts. This paper aims to identify personal strategies or behaviour adopted by women ward councillors to maximise their contribution to decision-making processes in the municipal councils. A qualitative approach and exploratory research design were employed. The study is limited to the male and female ward and proportional representative councillors from six local municipalities of the KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape provinces. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted using face-to-face and telephone techniques. The findings of the study were analysed using content analysis and themes were induced from interview data. The results of the study indicated that there were no strange behaviours as women were treated as equals in the municipal councils. However, the study findings revealed that for women councillors to maximise their contribution to decision-making processes, it depends on the social network that a woman belongs to; intimate relationships; aggressiveness and arrogance; self-confidence; education and the dress code.

**Keywords:** *Women Councillors; Municipal Council; Women's Behaviour; Women Strategies*

### **Introduction**

All over the world, councillors have experienced challenges when executing their duties due to a lack of support from different stakeholders. There is a dearth of strategies and programmes for councillors to utilise and maximise their contribution to decision-making processes. Democratic countries have

promulgating prescripts to increase the number of women in politics which has affected how local government operates. South Africa has been recognised worldwide for its advanced policy frameworks which have enhanced the condition and representation of women. Women are the most marginalised group, and this is worse when a woman is Black and physically challenged. It must be noted that White women in South Africa started voting in 1931, however Indians and coloured women were only allowed to vote in 1984, and African women not before 1994 (van der Gaag, 2004). Coloured refers to members of multiracial ethnic communities in Southern Africa who may have ancestry from more than one of the various populations inhabiting the region, including African, European, and Asian. After the reformation of local government in 1995/96, African women and men participated in decision making as councillors for the very first time. Swai and Anasel (2020) pointed out that all councillors have an equal opportunity to participate in the committee and council meetings.

Furthermore, councillors are elected irrespective of race, gender, or level of education, according to the Municipal Structures Act (32 of 2000). Yet, women's lack of political education has an impact on their representation and participation as politics is still regarded as male-dominated in South Africa. Political education refers to the process involving knowledge acquisition that aids the learners to understand political issues, political affairs and other related events; thereby help individuals to effectively carry out their civic duties, responsibilities and obligations as expected of them (Onuigbo, Eme and Asadu, 2018). For women councillors to survive and equally participate in the decision-making processes, they must have something exceptional about them like political skills, participate in community projects and activities, have family members active in politics, and use male-related connections and networks.

People behave in a specific way because they expect their behaviour to have positive, neutral or negative consequences (University of Pretoria, 2021). According to Whiteley (2010), people who are likely to participate using the social capital model are people with strong networks and have relationships with people they can trust within their societies. A study conducted by the Institute of Security Studies in 2014 shows that public protests in many communities across South Africa are related to the leadership of ward councillors, especially concerning their leadership characteristics and their role in service delivery (Mbandlwa & Mishi, 2020).

The objective of this paper is to identify personal strategies or behaviour adopted by women ward councillors to maximise their contribution to decision-making processes in the municipal councils in South Africa. This paper briefly discusses the international policies such as the United Nation (UN) conventions, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol, South African prescripts that relates to women's political representation and participation at the local government level. Relevant theories, strategies and empirical studies are discussed. This paper further explains the research methods, presents and discusses the findings and the conclusion. This paper will enable government and other state organs, political parties, community organisations, policymakers and municipalities to support women ward councillors before and during their office tenure as well as draft effective strategies to maximise their contribution to decision-making processes at the municipal level in South Africa.

## **Legal Framework on Women and Local Government**

The UN recommendations and conventions ratified by member states have been instrumental in the promotion of women's representation and participation in politics. The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979) calls on states to deal with the elimination of discrimination against women in all spheres of life be it political, social or economic. The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008) enjoined democratic countries like South Africa to recognise the rights of women as unchallengeable rights. Gawayana and Mukasa (2005) pointed out that Article 9 of The African Women's Protocol required states

to increase the representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making and ensure that this representation and participation is effective. In South Africa, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) requires national, provincial and local governments to adopt legislation and other measures to advance and promote gender equality.

Section 21 of the Constitution states that one can be elected as a councillor irrespective of race, gender or level of education. In addition, s22 of the Constitution (1996) provides for an equal number of councillors' representation from various political parties proportionally. The White Paper on Local Government (1998) which is regarded as a 'mini constitution' allows municipalities to assess the impact of their strategies on women and ensure that the needs and interests of women are incorporated into municipal planning processes. Local leadership and councillors must ensure that they understand the needs of the community and uplift the well-being of the community, which requires good leadership characteristics (White Paper, 1998). The Municipal Structures Act No. 117 of (1998) request for fifty percent of women candidates on party lists. The Municipal Systems Act No. 32 of 2000 makes provision for the local community to participate in the affairs of the municipality through political structures. The Municipal Systems Act (2000) allows for the elected municipal councillors to account to the communities who trusted them with their votes to deliver basic services to them (Saila, 2017). Notwithstanding the progressive nature of these legislations, evidence suggests that women remain under-represented in local municipal councils (Selokela, 2014; Majola, 2020, Holtkamp and Dressman, 2022; Makhubu and Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022).

## **Theoretical Framework on Women's Political Participation in Decision-Making Processes**

### **Human Capital Theory**

The paper adopted the human capital theory as it maintains that an organisation should employ individuals based on their human capital. The idea of human capital was formulated by Smith in the 18th century and the theory was popularised by Becker (1962). Schultz (1981) defines human capital theory as all human abilities to be either innate or acquired. Human capital provides organisations with a platform for diverse ideas and thoughts. Dess and Picken (1999) argued that human capital consists of the individual's capabilities, knowledge, skills and experience and individual learning. Becker (1996) highlighted that the attributes of the individual, such as education and experience represent assets at both individual and organisational levels. Beach (2009) maintained that individual capital can affect organisational human capital, such as collective competencies, organisational routines, company culture and relational capital as well. Human capital is developed through access to education and training programmes, executive coaches or mentors, and stretch job assignments (Hopkins, O'Neil, Passarelli & Bilimoria, 2008). This theory suggests that individuals and society derive economic benefits from investment in people like councillors to make informed decisions in the municipal councils. As stated above, councillors are elected irrespective of their gender and level of education. It would be interesting to learn how people who are seen to be lacking some of the attributes are faring and maximising their contribution to decision-making processes.

### **Social Capital Theory**

The first concept of social capital was presented by Hanifan (1916) but authors such as Bourdieu, Fukuyama, Coleman, and Putnam could not agree on its meaning. However, social capital is defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2017) as networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups. According to Putman (1995), social capital can be referred to as features of a social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. There are three main categories of social capital introduced over the years, namely, bonding, bridging (introduced by Putman, 1993) and linking. Bonding social capital is about people with common identities such as family,

close friends and people who share our culture or ethnicity (OECD, 2017). This form of social capital excludes other groups (Myeong & Seo, 2016) as only those accepted are allowed to bond with each other. Bridging social capital refers to the level and nature of contact and engagement between different communities, across racial, gendered, linguistic and class divides (Putman, 1993). Bridging is seen as inclusive as everybody interested could join the network and be welcomed by the group (McKenzie, 2008). Linking social capital refers to relations between individuals and groups in different social strata in a hierarchy where power, social status and wealth are accessed by different groups (Cote, 2001). O'Connell and Ramshaw (2018) argue that women politicians may be denied access to financial, material or other economic resources to which they are entitled by law. For them to survive in politics, they must understand how things are done.

Myeong and Seo (2016) warn that social capital involves three main factors which are trust, norm and network. However, authors have agreed that trust is the main indicator (Putman, 1993; Fukuyama, 1995; Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Van Deth, Marraffi, Newton, & Whiteley, 1999). Trust encourages individuals to participate as there is an expectation that that would bring benefits (Whiteley, 2005). Individuals need to involve themselves in any community activity as that can build some level of trust. In addition, for municipal councillors, men or women, networks are crucial for developing constituencies, gaining funds and political support from within when decisions have to be taken. These networks or social relationships are resources that can lead to the development and accumulation of human capital (Richard & Michael, 2015).

### **Social Capital and Education**

There are some relationships between social capital and education (Anderson, 2008; Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2011; Leeves, 2014). In most countries, women have higher levels of illiteracy and fewer years of schooling than men (Manqele, 2018). Nonetheless, Meena, Rusimbi, and Israel (2017) remarked that education on the social capacity to transform gender relations can occur in the home, the school, the community and the workplace. Furthermore, education seems to relate to trust, which may promote community connections and social collaboration within groups, which leads to political participation (Whiteley, 2005). However, politics is still male-dominated, culture and religion favour men with decision-making powers. Men have ample time to meet and educate each other about politics, sports and other issues, while women are taking care of children and their homes. Moreover, women often have difficulty entering male-dominated power networks Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD, 2020). Therefore, education can be a tool used to conscientise men and women on the need to transform oppressive gender relations and create empowerment social relations that consider women and men as equal development partners.

Women need to be educated and informed that political participation is not limited to election campaigns and mobilisation (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). Once elected as women ward councillors, documents must be read and understood, information must be disseminated, budget votes and decisions in various portfolios must be taken. Bauer and Okpotor (2013) pointed out that women who gain leadership positions tend to be those with higher levels of education and experience. However, education with no social networks could be detrimental for women in terms of their influence and contribution to decision making processes in municipal councils. These social networks, although unwritten, are powerful tools that individuals use to boost their careers in politics, which also gives them confidence.

### **Social Capital and Confidence**

According to Sales (1997), once elected, women often find the practical difficulties of municipal council work overwhelming. Nahar and Humaidan (2013) argued that the main obstacle limiting women to improve their positions in politics is the lack of confidence. Confidence is all about believing in yourself, creating a balance in your life and facing challenges head-on (Orth & Robbin, 2014).

Meanwhile, self-esteem is an individual's subjective evaluation of his or her worth as a person (Orth & Robbin, 2014). Carpenter, Daniere and Takahashi (2004) pointed out that people with higher levels of social capital are more confident. Once elected, most women develop the degree of confidence and self-esteem to express their point of view (Martin, 1993). However, Ibarra (1993) warns that women navigate between the two different networks for instrumental and expressive benefits which can be time-consuming and stressful. Women rely on other women for emotional support and friendship and look to men to provide instrumental career assistance (Hopkin et al, 2008). A self-confident woman ward councillor can join any network or group within the council irrespective of whether it is male or female dominated.

## **Theory of Tokenism**

Kanter's (1977) theory of tokenism holds that underrepresented individuals require unique strategies for success and achievement because they often must respond to different expectations and have different resources than their mainstream peers. The concept of "tokenism" has been used widely to explain many of the difficulties women face as they enter traditionally male dominated occupations. Tokenism explains womens' occupational experiences and their behavioural responses to experiences in terms of their numerical proportion, suggesting that barriers to womens' full occupational equality can be lowered by the hiring of more women in organisations that are highly skewed towards men (Zimmer, 1988).

To prevent tokenism in the normal workplace, one can deal with three components namely, diversity, equity, inclusion and examine how visibility, contrast, and assimilation are applied. With the theory of tokenism, a limited number of women are appointed ineffective positions within an existing group of males. However, in politics, gender quotas are employed for inclusion, to increase the number of women and their participation in the decision-making processes. Nonetheless, it must be noted that the number of women councillors is determined by their political parties. The proportional representation (PR) electoral system has been employed in South Africa to increase the number of women in politics (Bauer & Britton, 2006). On the contrary, women ward councillors are supposed to be elected by the community members to represent them. When elected in this fashion, the question is, do women councillors become just tokens within the councils? Do they behave in other strange ways to maximise their contribution to decision-making processes in male-dominated politics? It must be noted that in South Africa, women and Black people (meaning Africans, Indians, Coloured, and Chinese) became councillors after the first non-racial democratic local government elections between November 1995 and March 1996 (Majola, 2020). Nevertheless, reluctance persists on the part of political parties and certain networks and segments of public opinion who are opposed to the principle of quotas (Coates, 2014). It is believed that advocacy for gender quotas require a strong awareness-raising component targeted at communities and elected officials.

## **Women Versus Men's Behaviour in Politics**

One cannot address women and men issues without mentioning gender and sex. Gender is a suitable classification of analysis specifically because it provides a way to decode meaning and to lighten how gender levels are formed, well-maintained, and transformed over the multifaceted communication of standards, signs, personal relationships, community practices, and spiritual, financial, and party-political institutions (Bayes & Hawkesworth, 2006). Gender is all about biological differences between males and females and the understanding of those differences (Duerst-Lahti & Kelly, 1995). While sex refers to the biological distinctions between a female and a male, gender is more difficult because of the society which focuses on the conduct, characters, actions and beliefs based on a person considered being feminine or masculine (Dolan, 2004). As a social institution (Baker & Le Tendre, 2005), gender set the parameters of what decisions, choices or behaviours are deemed acceptable or unacceptable in a society (Manqele,



2018). Hence, there is an argument that women and men differ in their behaviours and leadership styles. Leadership is a cultural context, and many elements contribute such as communication styles, work ethics and behaviours (Chou, Lin, Chang, & Chuang, 2013; Mbandlwa, 2018)

Eagly and Johnson (1990) pointed out that women utilise participative or democratic leadership styles. Whereas men display a more self-assertive and dominant style and less deference and warmth with team members than women (Carli & Eagly, 1999). Men use lobbying and networking to climb the ladder of promotion, but women are barred from using these tools as men in high positions create their own cultural spaces and exclude women (Aryan, 2012). Furthermore, men who occupy high positions feel threatened by women; they see women as their competitors and rivals and do not welcome these new competitors (Aryan, 2012). Consequently, women who break into leadership positions, usually have to fight male resistance to get there (McGlen & O'Connor, 1998). Unfortunately, women leaders sometimes feel a need to exhibit or develop supposedly male qualities to be taken seriously (Bennet, 2010). At political meetings sometimes women have to 'shout and swear', which can be seen as trying to be a man as ladies are not supposed to do that (Franceschet, 2005). Cardinal, Migliorini, Giribone, Bizzi and Cavanna (2018), warns that psychological aggression is the use of verbal and non-verbal communication to damage and to control another person. This kind of aggression results in women not being seen as participants in meetings and therefore unable to air their views (Franceschet, 2005). However, having ambition and speaking with authority are not aggressive acts (Gluckman, 2018). Although women are seen as a weak gender and unable to perform their professional duties, women demonstrate their capacity and abilities as equal partners to their male colleagues (Koolace, 2012). Proactive work by male champions, in partnership with women, is necessary to establish an environment that empowers women's political participation at all levels of decision-making (IKnow Politics, 2017).

### **Personal Strategies and Behavioural Consequences**

As stated above, women and men differ on the behaviours of leadership, leadership competencies and in their leadership styles (Goleman, 1998; Eagly & Johnson, 1990). The municipal council has a responsibility to appoint standing committees and those committees are headed by councillors, including women ward and PR, who are referred to as portfolio heads in their respective portfolios (Mbandlwa, 2018). Sometimes women have to use different strategies for support and to succeed in those portfolios. Zif (2016) proposes that effective personal strategy means being able to think in multiple time frames, clarifying what one is trying to achieve over time as well as what needs to be done in the short term to get there. Behaviourally, women have been shown to express positive evaluations like compliments more frequently than men (Holmes, 1993), possibly to enhance bonding with their interaction partners (Brown & Levinson, 1987), whereas men utilise compliments less often (Holmes, 1993). Consequently, women are more likely to be subjected to abuse and harassment intended to undermine their sense of worth. This includes bullying behaviours calling into question their abilities, competency and morality, as well as a relentless focus on physical appearance (O'Connell & Ramshaw, 2018). Also, there is a perception that women dress in a certain way as a strategy to attract men, especially powerful and well-connected men for survival in their positions. The dress code is an individual choice, however, a woman's dignity can be shaken leading to harassment by their male counterparts. For instance, a Jamaican woman politician was humiliated and threatened by a fellow male politician because of her dress code. She was lambasted for wearing a sleeveless dress and called a 'Jezebel' (O'Connell & Ramshaw, 2018).

### **Empirical Studies on Women's Participation in Decision-Making Processes**

Hsiung's (2001) study of political engagement of women in China describes how women are persistently seen as sexualised beings with all unnecessary contact with men or even good working relationships with male colleagues often leading to speculation about affairs and inappropriate sexual behaviour. These women are forced to self-exclude themselves from networking opportunities with men

to protect their reputations (WFD, 2020). In another study conducted in Bangladesh by Kamal, Begum and Al-Hossienie, (2018), the findings revealed that the decisions are taken collectively. Although the mayor and councillors participate in the decision-making process, the mayor plays the dominant role. The study found the existence of patron-client relationships between the mayor and some councillors in the decision-making process. Due to this relationship, some close associates (councillors) of the mayor got privileges in the decision-making process. In addition, women councillors from reserved seats also cannot play an effective role due to the existence of patriarchal culture.

In the study conducted by Manqele (2018) in the Mtubatuba Local Municipality (South Africa), the participation of women in leadership and decision-making positions is low. Men's predominance in positions of municipal power, coupled with their well-established professional experience and social network patterns, provide them with greater access to support and information. Furthermore, another recent study on ward councillors in South Africa by Mbandlwa (2018) revealed that the personality, different leadership styles, passion for community and prioritising people's needs, literacy levels and individual leadership characteristics contribute to how decisions are made. It can be deduced that people are motivated to behave in a manner that leads to self-gratification (feelings of accomplishment) and in the process endure physical and mental pain and discomfort to avoid self-punishment (feelings of shame and failure) (University of Pretoria, 2021). Training programmes can be established by NGOs, political parties, educational and political institutions to help women in local government develop skills and self-confidence and to enable them to learn the functions and processes within this tier of government (Sindhuja & Murugan, 2017).

## ***Material and Methods***

The study adopted an exploratory research design and is qualitative in nature. It focuses on six local municipalities from KwaZulu-Natal Province, namely, uMsunduzi, uMngeni, uMshwati and uMkhambathini Local Municipalities as well as EThekweni Metropolitan Municipality. In the Eastern Cape Province, only uMzimvubu Local Municipality under Alfred Nzo District Municipality participated in the study. This was done to ensure that urban, semi-urban, rural and semi-rural municipalities are represented in the study. In KwaZulu-Natal, 78 out of 341 councillors were interviewed and 26 out of 54 councillors participated. There were twenty-three (23) women ward councillors; thirty-seven (37) male ward councillors, thirty (30) women PR councillors and fourteen (14) male PR councillors that participated in the study.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were adopted to allow the respondents flexibility when responding to questions. Face-to-face interviews were conducted, and the telephone was used due to the geographic dispersion of the respondents, especially from the EC. Data was collected using secondary information such as annual municipal reports, national policies and local government prescripts and other publications. Content analysis was used and themes were induced from the interview data. Data was presented in the form of tables and percentages. The study was limited to the ward and PR councillors. The gatekeeper's letter was obtained from targeted municipalities and ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal was granted. The issue of confidentiality was communicated to all respondents.

## ***Results and Discussion***

The results were analysed and presented using tables which list the themes and the frequency of the response. For this study, the respondents were asked to state strategies or behaviour that women councillors adopt to fully participate in decision-making processes in the municipal councils.

Table 1: Strategies/Behaviours Women Councillors Adopt

Themes	Frequency of Responses
None, women are treated as equals	34
Depends on the social network	26
Never took notice	12
Intimate relationships	7
Aggressiveness and arrogance	7
Self-confidence	6
Education	5
Dressing beautifully	5
Mobilisation at branch level	2

Source: Authors

As can be seen from Table 1, thirty-four respondents (33%) indicated that there was nothing different as women were treated as equals in the municipal council meetings. Respondent 57 indicated that *“it is difficult because I do not see women differently to males”*. Respondent 6 stated that *“there are older women who are not interested in anything”*. Respondent 16 said, *“There is equality before the council... I do recognise women coming with different perspective sometimes, but no mechanism is used by them to behave strangely”*. Manqele (2018) mentioned that gender sets the parameters of what decisions, choices or behaviours are deemed acceptable or unacceptable in a society. The findings are in line with Koolace (2012) who argued that women demonstrate their capacity and abilities as equal partners to their male colleagues. In South Africa, women and Blacks participated freely in politics after elections in 1994. The paper revealed that men and women partnerships are necessary to establish an environment that empowers women’s political participation at all levels of decision-making (IKnow Politics, 2017).

Twenty-five per cent of the respondents (n=26) indicated that it depends on the social network that a woman belongs to. However, some respondents felt that women charm men and/or team up with powerful groups to maximise their contribution to decision-making processes. Respondent 14 said, *“They use powerful male-dominated groups to survive when there are turbulences”*. Respondent 20 indicated that *“it depends on who you know...but we don’t have any problems in this municipality”*. Respondent 8 indicated that *“it depends on your network or friends...these relationships are affecting service delivery a lot...we are one party but do not get along because of these camps and networks with the party”*. The findings revealed that although women often have difficulty entering male-dominated power networks (WFD, 2020), they still adopt social capital as a strategy for survival. This finding is in line with the social capital theory where women ward councillors adopt bridging as it includes everybody interested in joining the network (Putman, 1993; McKenzie, 2008). Women ward councillors adopt these networks as resources, leading to the development and accumulation of human capital (Richard & Michael, 2015), where they are mentored and coached by their experienced male counterparts to maximise their contribution to decision-making processes. Women rely on other women for emotional support and friendship and look to men to provide instrumental career assistance (Hopkin et al, 2008). However, the network strategies indirectly affect service delivery and cause division among women especially when they are members of the same political party.

Eleven per cent of the respondents (n=12) stated that they never took notice of women adopting different strategies to participate or influence decisions in the council. Respondent 64 indicated that he has *“never noticed...never saw anyone behaving strangely or otherwise”*. The respondents revealed that there is progress in terms of not seeing gender as an issue when decisions have to be taken in the municipal councils. The UN conventions and national policies such as CEDAW, Constitution (1996) and the White Paper have led to women not being seen as different to men, although the equal number of



councillor representation is still a challenge. Another reason mentioned by seven respondents (7%) is the relationship which becomes intimate that favours certain women to be noticed. Respondent 49 said *“it is hearsay...I cannot be sure whether they (women) have bribed their way to the top”*.

Respondent 37 said *“in most cases, we tend to focus on what women are doing, but not look at what males are doing...we are all capable...if I fall in love with someone within the council, it's because I am not married...it must be personal, as human beings' people have feelings”*. Respondent 25 stated that *“politics is a dirty game...if you are weak, they (men) can use you...but they (women) are approached by males...males are the culprits by nature”*. Respondent 26 reported that *“when you join the council, men would propose and insist that you fall for him...if you do not, you will not be treated well...you will hear female colleagues saying why didn't you sleep with him...even if I have not said anything”*. Hsiung's (2001) study described how women are persistently seen as sexualised beings with all unnecessary contact with men or even good working relationships with male colleagues often leading to speculation about affairs and inappropriate sexual behaviour. From the findings, one can notice that intimate relationships are even encouraged by other women as a strategy to maximise their contribution to decision-making processes. However, women that want to protect their reputations have to self-exclude networking opportunities with men (WFD, 2020).

Seven per cent (n=7) of the respondents indicated that women adopt the strategy of being aggressive or arrogant to maximise their full participation in decision-making processes. Respondent 42 remarked that *“a woman would become more aggressive...I would like to say assertive but won't...sometimes they resort to personal issues rather than solving the problem”*. Respondent 38 indicated that *“others they pretend to be males by using harsh language...what is important is to put your point across, you need facts, no need to shout”*. Besides, Respondent 36 said, *“women develop arrogance...become defensive...they do not gang up...but arrogance is there”*. The findings are supported by Bennet (2010) who pointed out that women leaders sometimes feel a need to exhibit or develop supposedly male qualities to be taken seriously. At political meetings sometimes women have to 'shout and swear', which can be seen as trying to be a man, as ladies are not supposed to do that (Franceschet, 2005).

Six respondents (6%) indicated that women are self-confident which makes them well-disciplined, polite, and speak with respect. *“It is self-confidence...they do not need approval from any other person”* according to Respondent 73. Respondent 26 said, *“confidence is important especially when you are given a position”*. This finding is in contravention with Nahar (2003) who argued that the main obstacle limiting women to improve their positions in politics is the lack of confidence. This paper revealed that people with higher levels of social capital are more confident (Carpenter, Daniere & Takahashi, 2004). Furthermore, Martin (1993) pointed out that most women develop the degree of confidence and self-esteem to express their point of view during the meeting once elected.

Education is another strategy mentioned by five per cent (n=5) of the respondents. Respondent 60 said, *“with political education, ...they have become very vocal in community meetings”*. Respondent 95 indicated that *“the motto is if you want to be independent then empower yourself by getting educated...no one will give you political freedom...educate yourself”*. However, Respondent 34 said, *“understanding the industry is important as there is no qualification needed...it depends on the (political) background”*. Bauer and Okpotor (2013) pointed out that women who gain leadership positions tend to be those with higher levels of education and experience. This is in contravention with s21 of the Constitution (1996), which states that one may be elected irrespective of gender and level of education. Mlambo and Kapingura (2019) emphasised that women need to be educated and be informed that political participation is not limited to election campaigns and mobilisation. Nevertheless, human capital, especially individual learning for women ward councillors, is crucial to maximising their contribution to decision-making processes in the municipal council.

Dressing beautifully was another strategy adopted by women councillors to maximise their contribution to decision-making in municipal councils according to five respondents (5%). Respondent 14 said, “*women dress beautifully; you would think that they will talk sense*”. However, Respondent 67, a woman mentioned that “*I do not see that as an issue...you do not dress well to get favours*”. Furthermore, Respondent 99 added that “*dress is important, but does not make a difference*”. It must be noted that it is the male respondent who felt that women adopt dressing beautifully as a strategy to maximise their contribution to decision-making processes in the council. However, according to this paper, the dress code does not assist women ward councillors in maximising their contribution to decision-making processes. One per cent (n=2) of the respondents mentioned that there was no need to adopt any strategy when you have mobilised people at branch level. Respondent 63 said, “*They are strong in their branches...they mobilise strongly and are respected by communities...they do not depend on anybody*”. This response came from a male respondent who felt that the women ward councillors who have worked hard and independently contribute immensely to decision-making processes at the municipal level. These women ward councillors account to the communities who trusted them with their votes to deliver services to them in terms of the Municipal Systems Act (2000) as amended (Saila, 2017).

### **Conclusion**

The objective of this paper was to identify personal strategies or behaviour adopted by women ward councillors to maximise their contribution to decision-making processes in the municipal councils in South Africa. The finding of the paper indicated that there were no strange behaviours or adopted strategies as the majority of women ward councillors were treated as equals when decisions are taken in the municipal councils. However, evidence shows that for women ward councillors to maximise their contribution to decision-making processes in the municipal councils, it depends on the social network that a woman belongs to, intimate relationships, aggressiveness and arrogance, self-confidence, education, the dress code and mobilisation at branch level. It is also interesting that a reasonable percentage of the respondents mentioned that they never took notice of women ward councillors adopting any personal strategies or behaviour to maximise their contribution or influence decisions in the municipal councils. This indicates that gender is not much of an issue once women are elected as councillors. The next local government elections in South Africa are scheduled for late 2021. The representation and participation of women cannot be overemphasised as their role is crucial in terms of dealing with COVID-19 pandemic matters during and after for community benefit.

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