



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Effectiveness of Gender Mainstreaming Strategies in Promoting Sustainable Development in Amahlathi Local Municipality, Or Tambo District, Eastern Cape, South Africa

Matthew Damilola, Omojemite^{1*}, Elphina Nomabandla Cishe²^{1,2}Walter Sisulu University, South Africa

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Jul 31, 2024 Accepted: Sep 27, 2024	Despite the South African government's commitment to gender equality and the adoption of gender mainstreaming as a strategic approach to development, significant disparities persist, particularly in rural areas. This study investigates the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming strategies in promoting sustainable development in Amahlathi Local Municipality, OR Tambo District. This study employed a qualitative research design, focusing on community leaders and stakeholders within the Amahlathi Local Municipality, South Africa. The sample comprised 12 community leaders from this municipality. Data was collected from primary sources (discussion) and secondary sources (journals, articles and books) and analyzed thematically. Ethical considerations were addressed, and confidentiality was ensured. The finding of the study reveals that Amahlathi Local Municipality is committed to integrating gender perspectives into development policies and programs, aligning with global and regional frameworks like the Beijing Declaration, the Sustainable Development Goals, the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. However, challenges such as sporadic implementation, incomplete integration, entrenched cultural norms, resource limitations, and institutional resistance persist, particularly in gender-responsive budgeting and women's representation in decision-making. Despite these obstacles, progress in breaking gender stereotypes, especially in sports, and the positive impact of employment equity policies demonstrate the potential of gender mainstreaming strategies. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that there should be fostering of individual responsibility from childhood, promotion of LGBTQI+ inclusivity in education, raising of awareness about gender-based violence, challenging traditional gender roles, and prioritizing women's safety and participation. Integrating gender considerations into decision-making which will be essential for strengthening community inclusivity and governance, addressing both cultural and structural barriers to achieve genuine gender equality.
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*Corresponding Author: momojemite@wsu.ac.za	

INTRODUCTION

The poor quality of life for many South Africans remains a significant challenge, with high levels of poverty, unemployment, and disempowerment disproportionately affecting women, particularly black women in rural areas. These challenges lead to a high dependency on government assistance

for basic services. When local governments fail to address these needs, they perpetuate cycles of poverty and exclusion. According to a study by Stats SA (2020), poverty levels are highest in rural areas, with black South African women being the most affected group. The World Bank (2022) also highlights that unemployment in South Africa is among the highest in the world, exacerbating poverty and social inequality, particularly in marginalized communities. There is a critical need to examine the intersection of gender, empowerment, and governance. The historical context of apartheid has entrenched disparities, leading to ongoing struggles for marginalized groups (Lone, et al, 2022). South Africa's significant socio-economic challenges, including high levels of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, particularly affect black women in rural areas, contributing to a low quality of life and dependency on government assistance (Statistics South Africa, 2020).

Despite progress in policy development, the effective implementation of gender mainstreaming remains uneven, particularly at the local government level. Gender mainstreaming, integrating gender perspectives into all policy stages, is crucial for gender equality and sustainable development (OECD, 2023). Success varies widely, influenced by local contexts and governance capacity (UNDP, 2024). South Africa's legal and policy frameworks strongly support gender mainstreaming and equality. The Constitution (1996) prohibits gender discrimination and mandates proactive measures for marginalized women. The Labour Relations Act (1995) promotes gender equality in the workplace through collective bargaining. The Employment Equity Act (1998) requires employers to address gender disparities and implement affirmative action. The Skills Development Act (1998) and Skills Development Levies Act (1999) encourage women's participation in skills development. Public Service Regulations (2001) set targets for gender equity in the public sector, while the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) and Draft National Programme of Action on Women's Empowerment (2001) focus on integrating gender into training and government policies. Gender Mainstreaming in the South African Public Service (2006) provides guidelines for gender-sensitive public service work, and the Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill (2015) aims to enforce gender mainstreaming across all sectors. Chapter 3 of the 2001 Bill (Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act) mandates the elimination of gender discrimination and removal of barriers to equality. The Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill of 2015 and Chapter 3 of the 2001 Bill are also significant (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023). However, the practical implementation of these frameworks requires further examination.

Assessing how well gender perspectives are incorporated into policies and programs is essential to gauge local governance's commitment to gender equality. This includes analyzing policies, development plans, and resource allocation to ensure they meet gender-specific needs and identifying gaps to address barriers to women's full participation and empowerment (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023). Participatory development approaches are crucial for reflecting women's voices and needs in local policies (Gender Link, 2023).

Evaluating gender mainstreaming strategies reveals both successes and challenges. Successes include increased women's participation in decision-making, improved access to resources, and better socio-economic outcomes (Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010). Challenges include institutional resistance, lack of training, inadequate funding, and cultural norms perpetuating inequality (Gupta, et al 2023). Understanding these factors is crucial for effective practices. Assessing the impact on sustainable development shows broader benefits in education, health, economic opportunities, and environmental sustainability, highlighting the link between gender equality and sustainable development (OECD, 2023). Hence, this study investigates the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming strategies in addressing these issues and promoting sustainable development in Amahlathi Local Municipality, OR Tambo District.

2.0 Rational for the Study

Despite the South African government's commitment to gender equality and the adoption of gender mainstreaming as a strategic approach to development, significant disparities persist, particularly in rural areas. The Amahlathi Local Municipality exemplifies these challenges, where poverty, unemployment, and disempowerment disproportionately affect black women. The integration of gender perspectives into local development policies and programs remains inconsistent, leading to insufficient support for women's specific needs and hindering their empowerment.

Gender mainstreaming efforts face numerous obstacles, including institutional resistance, lack of awareness and training, inadequate funding, and deeply entrenched cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality. These barriers result in a gap between policy intentions and practical outcomes, limiting the effectiveness of gender equality initiatives. Moreover, there is a lack of comprehensive assessment regarding the extent to which gender perspectives are incorporated into local development plans and the impact of these efforts on sustainable development.

Without a thorough understanding of the successes and challenges of implementing gender mainstreaming strategies, and the perceptions and experiences of local stakeholders, it is difficult to devise effective solutions to promote gender equality and sustainable development. Consequently, there is an urgent need to evaluate the current state of gender mainstreaming in the Amahlathi Local Municipality, identify the factors hindering its success, and develop recommendations to enhance its implementation.

This study aims to address these gaps by exploring the integration of gender perspectives in local development policies and programs, assessing the successes and challenges of gender mainstreaming strategies, and evaluating their impact on sustainable development outcomes. By doing so, it seeks to provide actionable insights and recommendations to improve gender mainstreaming practices, ultimately contributing to the empowerment of women and the overall development of the Amahlathi Local Municipality.

3.0 Research Questions

- How are gender perspectives integrated into local development policies and programs in the Amahlathi Local Municipality?
- What are the challenges of implementing gender mainstreaming strategies in the Amahlathi Local Municipality?
- How do gender mainstreaming strategies impact sustainable development outcomes in the Amahlathi Local Municipality?
- What is the experience of local stakeholders regarding gender mainstreaming efforts?
- What recommendations can be made to enhance the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming strategies in promoting sustainable development?

5.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender mainstreaming, as defined by the United Nations, involves integrating gender perspectives and considerations into all stages of policy, program, and project development (Jinia & Asaduzzaman, 2021). This approach aims to address the different impacts of policies and programs on women and men and promote gender equality. It has been recognized as a critical strategy for achieving sustainable development (Bangani & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020). Despite its importance, the implementation of gender mainstreaming varies widely, with challenges in achieving meaningful integration into local governance and development practices (Republic of South Africa, 2023).

The literature identifies several common challenges in implementing gender mainstreaming strategies. These include institutional resistance, lack of awareness and training, insufficient funding, and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality (Caywood & Darmstadt, 2024). Institutional resistance often arises from a lack of commitment or understanding among key stakeholders,

resulting in inadequate support for gender-focused initiatives. Additionally, the absence of comprehensive training on gender issues can hinder the effective implementation of mainstreaming strategies (Patricia, 2013). Funding is another significant challenge. Without adequate resources, gender mainstreaming efforts are often limited in scope and impact (Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010). Cultural norms and societal attitudes towards gender roles can also pose substantial barriers, particularly in rural areas where traditional views may be more deeply entrenched (Farnworth & Colverson, (2016)).

Despite these challenges, there have been notable successes in gender mainstreaming efforts. Studies highlight increased participation of women in decision-making processes as a significant achievement (Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010). For example, programs that promote women's leadership and participation in local governance have led to more inclusive and representative decision-making bodies (Akala, 2018). Improved access to resources and services for women, such as education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, are also critical indicators of success (Marcus & Somji, 2024)).

The link between gender equality and sustainable development is well-documented. Marcus & Somji, (2024) argue that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a prerequisite for sustainable development. Integrating gender perspectives into development policies and programs can lead to more effective and inclusive outcomes. For example, ensuring that women have equal access to education and economic opportunities can enhance overall community well-being and economic growth (Akala, 2018).). In the context of environmental sustainability, women's participation in decision-making processes can lead to more sustainable resource management practices (Lone et al, 2022). This is particularly relevant in rural areas where women are often the primary managers of natural resources. By involving women in environmental governance, communities can develop more sustainable and resilient practices.

Engaging local stakeholders in gender mainstreaming efforts is crucial for their success. Akala, (2018) emphasize the importance of participatory approaches that involve community members, local officials, and civil society organizations. These stakeholders can provide valuable insights into the practical challenges and successes of gender mainstreaming initiatives. Their engagement also helps ensure that gender mainstreaming efforts are contextually relevant and responsive to the needs and priorities of the community (Farnworth & Colverson, 2016).).

In South Africa, gender mainstreaming has been incorporated into national policies and development frameworks. The government has committed to promoting gender equality through various initiatives and legislative measures (Republic of South Africa, 2020). However, the effectiveness of these efforts varies across different regions and municipalities. Rural areas, such as the Amahlathi Local Municipality, face unique challenges that require targeted strategies to ensure the successful integration of gender perspectives into local development initiatives

6.0 Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the theory of Feminist Institutionalism and Policy Implementation Theory.

6.1 Feminist Institutionalism

Feminist institutionalism offers a critical perspective on how institutions and governance structures shape gender relations and influence policy outcomes. It emphasizes the need for institutional change to achieve gender equality, arguing that existing institutions often reflect and reinforce patriarchal norms and practices (Krook & Mackay, 2020). According to this perspective, gender mainstreaming involves transforming institutions to ensure they actively promote gender equality rather than perpetuating gender-based inequalities.

6.2 Policy Implementation Theory

Policy implementation theory provides insights into how policies are translated into action on the ground. It highlights the importance of effective governance, stakeholder engagement, resource allocation, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in achieving policy goals (Majone, 1989). Gender mainstreaming efforts informed by policy implementation theory focus on overcoming implementation barriers such as institutional resistance, inadequate resources, and limited political will, to ensure that gender equality objectives are effectively realized.

6.3 Intersection of Feminist Institutionalism and Policy Implementation Theory

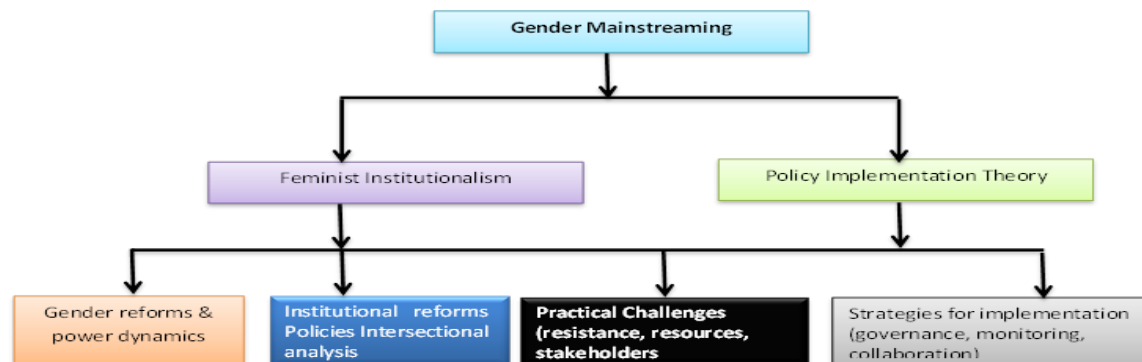


Figure 1: Framework of the Intersection of Feminist Institutionalism and Policy Implementation Theory (Source: Researchers’ design, 2024)

Policy implementation theory and feminist institutionalism intersect and complement each other in supporting gender mainstreaming efforts through a comprehensive approach. Together, these theories analyze institutional dynamics (Miller & Verloo, 2005), advocate for reforms (True, 2012) address practical challenges (Hafner-Burton, & Pollack, 2002) such as institutional resistance and resource constraints, and propose context-specific strategies for effective implementation of gender mainstreaming policies. By integrating these perspectives, municipalities like Amahlathi can strive towards achieving more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development outcomes. This integrated approach not only aims to promote gender equality but also fosters social justice by ensuring that policies and practices are responsive to diverse gender needs and realities within local contexts.

7.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design, focusing on community leaders and stakeholders within the Amahlathi Local Municipality, South Africa. The study employed purposive sampling technique to select the sample. The sample comprised 12 community leaders from this municipality. Focus group discussions were utilized, specifically semi-structured in nature, allowing the researchers to explore predetermined themes while remaining flexible to adapt to the participants' responses. This approach combines the structured guidance of formal interviews with the openness of unstructured conversations, making it suitable for qualitative studies. Data was collected from primary sources (discussions) and secondary sources (journals, articles, books) and analyzed thematically. The study employed a systematic procedure for selecting journals, articles, and books. This process included identifying relevant databases like Google Scholar and JSTOR, using specific keywords related to community leadership and local governance, and screening sources for relevance, credibility, and research rigour. Research questions regarding community leadership, stakeholder perspectives, and local governance practices were likely addressed using data from the semi-structured discussions, while those focused on theoretical frameworks and broader contexts sourced data from journals, articles, and books. Ethical concerns were managed by ensuring the confidentiality of participants, which typically involved obtaining informed consent, ensuring

anonymity in the reporting of findings, and handling sensitive data with care to prevent unauthorized access.

8.0 RESULTS

Theme 1: Sporadic and Inconsistent Integration of Gender Perspectives

In the Amahlathi Local Municipality, integrating gender perspectives into local development policies and programs is a vital step towards achieving sustainable and inclusive growth. Recognizing the unique challenges and contributions of women, the municipality has taken strides to embed gender considerations into its development framework. This integration will address gender disparities, promote equality, and ensure that both women and men can fully participate in and benefit from the municipality's development efforts. The respondents for this study express their views on the extent to which gender perspectives integrated into local development policies and programs in the Amahlathi Local Municipality.

P5: *"In the private sector, there's nothing like that because I think the law only applies in government spheres".*

The statement in P5 highlights a perceived gap in the application of gender-related laws, suggesting that such regulations are primarily enforced in the public sector and not in the private sector. This indicates a potential shortfall in the regulatory framework and awareness, where private companies may not be as rigorously required or motivated to integrate gender perspectives into their policies and practices. As a result, there could be uneven progress in achieving gender equality, with significant implications given the private sector's crucial role in employment and economic activities.

P9: *"As a woman living in Amahlathi Local Municipality, I can see that there have been efforts to integrate gender perspectives into local development policies and programs. There are initiatives aimed at empowering women, such as entrepreneurship training and support for women-owned businesses. Educational programs targeting young girls and efforts to reduce gender-based violence are also noticeable. However, these initiatives often feel sporadic and not fully embedded in the broader development framework. While there is an acknowledgment of gender issues, the depth and consistency of integration could be improved. For instance, gender-responsive budgeting and representation of women in decision-making processes are still areas that need more robust implementation".*

The respondent acknowledges visible efforts, such as entrepreneurship training, support for women-owned businesses, educational programs for girls, and initiatives to reduce gender-based violence. However, these efforts often appear sporadic and not fully embedded in the broader development framework, indicating a need for more systematic and consistent integration.

P4: *"Educational initiatives for young girls and efforts to combat gender-based violence are also visible. However, these initiatives often feel scattered and not fully embedded within the broader development framework. While there is an acknowledgment of gender issues, the depth and consistency of integration could be improved".*

P4 echoes similar sentiments to those expressed in P9, highlighting visible educational initiatives for young girls and efforts to combat gender-based violence in Amahlathi Local Municipality. Despite these positive steps, the respondent notes that these initiatives often feel scattered and not fully integrated into the broader development framework. This sporadic implementation suggests that while there is acknowledgment of gender issues, the approach lacks the necessary depth and consistency.

P2: *"When a father directs, how does a mother direct? In rural areas, we have children who are raised differently; girls are raised for cooking and chores, boys to work or for other activities. I think such matters should be considered individually. The type of upbringing I see is one I will correct".*

P2 highlights the ingrained gender roles in rural upbringing, stressing the importance of addressing and correcting these biases individually. Together, these responses reveal the progress, challenges, and ongoing need for comprehensive gender equality efforts across various sectors.

Theme 2: Challenges of implementing gender mainstreaming strategies in the Amahlathi Local Municipality.

Implementing gender mainstreaming in Amahlathi Local Municipality faces challenges like cultural norms reinforcing gender roles, limited resources, and the need for capacity building among staff. Issues include data collection, community resistance, and institutional barriers. Overcoming these is crucial for effective, sustainable, and inclusive gender integration, advancing equitable development. The respondents for this study express their views on challenges of implementing strategies in Amahlathi Local Municipality.

P1: *“Traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained in our community. Changing these long-standing beliefs and practices is a slow process, and there can be resistance both from men and women who are accustomed to the status quo”.*

P3: *“Exactly. When we talk about services, some churches are bound by laws that can't change some because even this pastor and his wife don't want a woman to speak about it. So, many, but I must say that there are churches that are open and want to mainstream gender, but you'll find another issue with the majority of women, they can't do away with women; instead, they have to empower and use them”.*

P4: *“For me, what's concerning is that gender mainstreaming is not fully implemented because many problems arise from it. For example, the killing of women is a result of people not being educated, and not being aware of this issue”.*

P: *“I wanted to mention the challenges, if we want to mainstream the challenge, we face is resistance from those in power, you will find those who don't want it because things will shake as if their authority changes. Next, you will find that sometimes people lack the skills they need to be mainstreamed”.*

P4: *“Labour has programs where people get a chance to voice out things happening in their employment conditions. But people's grievances are not taken seriously”.*

From the responses of P1, P3, and P4 collectively, several key themes emerge regarding the challenges of implementing gender mainstreaming in the context of Amahlathi Local Municipality. P1 reveals the deeply entrenched nature of traditional gender roles within the community, highlighting the slow pace of change and resistance from individuals accustomed to the status quo. This resistance is further elaborated in P3, where institutional barriers, particularly within churches, are mentioned as hindrances to gender mainstreaming efforts. P3 also acknowledges pockets of openness within certain churches but points out broader societal challenges, such as cultural norms and women's empowerment issues that continue to impede progress. P4 contributes by emphasizing the systemic issues and lack of effective implementation of gender mainstreaming policies, citing examples like gender-based violence and labor grievances not being adequately addressed. Together, these statements paint a complex picture of the multifaceted challenges faced in advancing gender equality, including cultural resistance, institutional barriers, and inadequate policy enforcement.

Theme 3: Impact of Gender Mainstreaming on Sustainable Development

The impact of gender mainstreaming strategies on sustainable development outcomes in the Amahlathi Local Municipality is a critical area of focus in contemporary local governance. Gender mainstreaming aims to integrate gender perspectives into all aspects of policymaking, planning, and implementation to promote equity and inclusivity. The respondents for this study express their view on the impact gender mainstreaming strategies on sustainable development outcomes in the Amahlathi Local Municipality.

P5: *“Government access is facilitated because there's something called employment equity that the government has developed to bridge the pay gap. Currently, it's not like before where only mothers were paid. Now, due to employment equity, this is balanced, and it also follows the designated person. In this position of employment equity, we have statistics. Many women in managerial positions are being promoted, so preference will be given to women because there's a governing body that encourages this, and these are our policies”.*

P9: *“I think when gender equality is achieved, it greatly assists in achieving the goal. For example, a physically capable person is needed for the position, someone who can think on their toes quickly, and someone who will be available even after hours. The job post will specify that you must be strong, fit, reliable, or convenient because you can't be found wanting. Then the mandate will say a qualified person must enter. There won't be sustainable development in this sector because the mandate will be implemented if one person is replaced by another. After all, that person doesn't meet the requirements. Therefore, service delivery suffers. So, I think mainstreaming wants to ensure alignment and improvement to achieve goals and service delivery”.*

P6: *“In the private sector, there's nothing like that because I think the law only applies in government spheres”.*

P7: *There's another problem because even in some companies, cooperation among people, whether it's the voice of a mother or a father, isn't taken seriously. Some don't take it seriously, just as sometimes even NGOs will get funding from other sectors, but it's not found elsewhere because some sectors will be resistant. You'll see because they don't accept someone of a different gender in the way they perceive it.*

The responses highlight various perspectives on the implementation and impact of gender equality policies. P5 discusses the role of government policies, such as employment equity, in promoting gender balance by facilitating the promotion of women into managerial positions through structured statistics and governing bodies. P9 emphasizes the importance of gender equality in achieving organizational goals and service delivery but also points out the necessity of meeting job-specific requirements, suggesting that mainstreaming gender equality should align with job performance to avoid service delivery issues. P6 contrasts the public sector's efforts with the private sector's lack of similar gender equality laws, indicating a significant disparity in policy application. P7 adds that in some companies and NGOs, resistance to gender equality persists due to cultural and institutional biases, which undermine cooperation and acceptance of diverse genders. Together, these viewpoints emphasized the dual benefits of structured policies like employment equity in promoting gender equality within specific sectors, while also advocating for broader implementation of gender mainstreaming principles to achieve inclusive and effective local governance and sustainable development outcomes.

Theme 4: Perspectives of Local Stakeholders on Gender Mainstreaming Efforts

Understanding the perceptions of local stakeholders regarding gender mainstreaming efforts is crucial for assessing the effectiveness and impact of these initiatives in Amahlathi Local Municipality. Local stakeholders, including community members, government officials, non-governmental organizations, and businesses, will play pivotal roles in shaping and implementing gender mainstreaming policies. They provide valuable perspectives on the challenges, successes, and opportunities associated with integrating gender perspectives into local development agendas

P7: *“There's a situation where I grew up playing football, rugby, and boxing, activities usually associated with fathers, but now, sports are played by both genders. The important thing is not being prevented from playing a particular sport due to gender stereotypes. Everyone should have the opportunity, but you know they are not all treated equally”.*

P11: *“My attitude towards this question or emotions are very strong based on feminism because for a long time, women have been oppressed, and it has become a norm that a woman is supposed to do ABCD: be in the kitchen, be a nurse, be an all-rounder in the house. A man, on the other hand, only needs to go to work and come back home to wait to be served meat at mealtime, have water to wash with, everything done for him by his wife”.*

P3: *“We have issues like GBV in society. It starts now; it may continue, or it may be done by the youth or adults. Let's find out what makes rape happen. It is done by people who start from the age of 30. You need to intervene because you take on these cases to find out who committed the act. You need to know in society who commits rape.”*

P4: *“Even in the banking sector, I'm saying if mothers were handling the finances of the whole world, there wouldn't have been much corruption here among people who want to steal. If gender mainstreaming were to be introduced in the banking sector, what would be the mother's role in handling global finances? Because we can't get loans, people who show policies that can't even consider what the background of the project is.”*

The responses illustrate diverse viewpoints on gender equality and the challenges faced. P7 highlights the breaking of gender stereotypes in sports, emphasizing the need for equal opportunities despite ongoing inequalities. P11 expresses strong feminist sentiments, underscoring the traditional oppression of women and the entrenched expectations of their roles within society. P3 raises concerns about gender-based violence (GBV), stressing the importance of understanding its roots and the need for societal intervention, especially focusing on perpetrators within specific age groups. P4 discusses gender mainstreaming in the banking sector, suggesting that women, if more involved in financial management, could reduce corruption and better consider project backgrounds when handling loans. Collectively, these responses emphasize the need for continued efforts toward gender equality, addressing stereotypes, societal roles, GBV, and institutional practices.

Theme 5: Enhancing Gender Mainstreaming Strategies for Sustainable Development

Enhancing the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming strategies to promote sustainable development requires strategic recommendations that address current challenges and optimize opportunities for inclusive growth. The respondent suggested their recommendations.

P3: *“For me, taking individual responsibility starts from within the family. We start taking responsibility within the family with the father and mother when we are children, and we grow up with them until adulthood. I mean, at home, when we are children, we start with the father and mother taking responsibility, and as we grow up, we move to society”.*

P1: *“Let's educate ourselves so we can understand and live with LGBTQI+ individuals”.*

P4: *“let's raise awareness so that people can see the severity of the issue. Gender-based violence is a societal issue. We all need to address it in society, so, in other words, its relevance today is crucial”.*

P11: *“A man, on the other hand, only needs to go to work and come back home to wait to be served meat at mealtime, have water to wash with, everything done for him by his wife. So, my first instinct or thought about individual responsibility is influenced by the idea that women are often controlled by men, and we need to challenge that thinking, the typical thinking about what a woman is supposed to do, the problem lies with what is deemed as “supposed to do” and its implications. I think the main root that we need to address is this mindset”.*

P10: *“Efforts to combat gender-based violence create a safer community. When women feel safe, they can participate more fully in all aspects of community life, leading to overall improved well-being and stability”.*

P12: *“Gender mainstreaming fosters a more inclusive and equitable community. When women are included in decision-making processes, the decisions made are more reflective of the community’s diverse needs. This inclusivity strengthens community bonds and trust in local governance”.*

Viewing P3, P1, P4, P11, P10, and P12 collectively, various perspectives on gender roles, responsibilities, and the impact of gender mainstreaming strategies emerge. P3 emphasizes the importance of starting individual responsibility within the family unit, suggesting that societal change begins with nurturing responsible behavior from childhood. This perspective aligns with broader discussions on how familial dynamics shape societal norms and values. In contrast, P1 advocates for education and understanding to promote inclusivity, particularly concerning LGBTQI+ individuals, highlighting the need for societal acceptance and awareness. P4 underscores the urgency of addressing gender-based violence as a societal issue, stressing the severity and relevance of the problem in contemporary contexts. P11 critiques traditional gender roles and societal expectations, arguing for challenging and reshaping these norms to empower women and promote equality. P10 highlights the transformative impact of efforts to combat gender-based violence on community safety and well-being, emphasizing the link between women's security and their full participation in community life. Finally, P12 highlights the benefits of gender mainstreaming in fostering inclusivity and equity, particularly through women's participation in decision-making processes, which enhances community cohesion and governance effectiveness. Together, these responses emphasised the multifaceted nature of gender dynamics and the critical role of gender mainstreaming in promoting sustainable development outcomes and societal change.

9.0 DISCUSSION

Sporadic and Inconsistent Integration of Gender Perspectives

The finding of the study reveals that the Amahlathi Local Municipality shows commitment to integrating gender perspectives into development policies and programs, aiming to address disparities and promote equality. However, challenges such as sporadic implementation and incomplete integration remain, particularly in areas like gender-responsive budgeting and women's representation in decision-making. This commitment echoes the principles of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015). Regional frameworks like the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development further emphasize the importance of gender equality in development (African Union, 2015). Despite these commitments, challenges such as sporadic implementation and incomplete integration persist, particularly in areas like gender-responsive budgeting and women's representation in decision-making (World Bank, 2012; UN Women, 2020). Learning from successful case studies, such as Bogotá, Colombia, and the eThekweni Municipality in South Africa, can provide valuable insights into overcoming these challenges and achieving genuine gender equality in local governance (Davis, 2016;). However, addressing the challenges of sporadic implementation and incomplete integration, particularly in gender-responsive budgeting and women's representation in decision-making, will require sustained commitment, capacity building, and the development of robust institutional frameworks.

Challenges of implementing gender mainstreaming strategies in the Amahlathi Local Municipality.

The study finds that implementing gender mainstreaming in Amahlathi is significantly impeded by entrenched cultural norms, resource limitations, and resistance within institutions and communities. Cultural norms continue to reinforce traditional gender roles, making it challenging to promote gender equality, as echoed by Akala (2018), who highlighted similar issues across South African communities. Resource constraints further exacerbate the situation, with limited financial, human, and technical resources hindering the effective execution of gender policies (Statistics South Africa,

2020). This lack of resources affects training, awareness programs, and support for women-led initiatives. Additionally, resistance from both institutions and communities presents a major obstacle. Bangani, & Vyas-Doorgapersad, (2020), discuss how institutional inertia and a lack of political will significantly hinder policy implementation, while community resistance, rooted in patriarchal attitudes, further complicates efforts. This aligns with recent insights from Rao (2016), who emphasize that overcoming these barriers requires a multifaceted approach, including legal reforms, resource allocation, and community engagement to transform societal attitudes.

Impact of Gender Mainstreaming on Sustainable Development

The study reveals that gender mainstreaming strategies have positively impacted government sectors, exemplified by employment equity policies that promote women into managerial roles. This progress demonstrates the potential for such strategies to foster gender equality and enhance institutional effectiveness. However, to fully meet sustainable development goals, it is essential to broaden the application of these strategies across all sectors. Inclusive governance and equitable service delivery require comprehensive integration of gender perspectives in areas beyond employment equity, such as healthcare, education, and economic development. This broader application ensures that gender mainstreaming contributes to the holistic development of society, addressing disparities and promoting equality across all facets of governance and public service. Sustainable progress hinges on a unified approach where gender equality is a core principle guiding all policy and programmatic decisions, ensuring that development benefits are equitably shared and that no group is left behind (UNDP, 2010; World Bank, 2012).

Perspectives of Local Stakeholders on Gender Mainstreaming Efforts

The finding of the study reveals that local stakeholders perceive progress in breaking gender stereotypes, particularly in areas like sports participation, while others strongly critique traditional gender roles and advocate for feminist principles to challenge societal norms. These perspectives highlight ongoing challenges and opportunities for gender mainstreaming efforts. This indicates a positive shift towards more inclusive practices that challenge traditional gender norms and provide broader opportunities for all genders (International Alert, 2023). However, despite these advancements, there is still strong critique of traditional gender roles, with many stakeholders advocating for feminist principles to further challenge and dismantle these societal norms. This critique shows the persistent barriers to achieving full gender equality and the need for continuous efforts in gender mainstreaming (UNICEF, 2021). While progress in specific areas, like sports, showcases the potential for change, the deep-rooted nature of traditional gender roles calls for sustained advocacy and policy interventions to create a more equitable society (Lorber, 2010).

Enhancing Gender Mainstreaming Strategies for Sustainable Development

The study reveals that stakeholders recommend several strategies to promote gender equality and inclusivity. First, they emphasize the importance of fostering individual responsibility from childhood, suggesting that early education should instill values of equality and respect. This includes promoting LGBTQI+ inclusivity in educational settings to ensure all students feel represented and accepted (UNESCO, 2018). Raising awareness about gender-based violence is another critical recommendation, aiming to educate communities about the prevalence and impact of such violence and the importance of prevention and support measures (WHO, 2019). Stakeholders also advocate for challenging traditional gender roles, which often perpetuate inequality and limit opportunities for individuals based on gender. Prioritizing women's safety and participation is seen as essential for creating environments where women can thrive without fear of violence or discrimination. Additionally, integrating gender considerations into decision-making processes is recommended to strengthen community inclusivity and governance. This means ensuring that policies and programs are designed and implemented with a gender perspective, taking into account the different needs and

experiences of all genders. Such integration is crucial for creating equitable communities where everyone can participate fully and benefit from development initiatives (UN Women, 2020). These recommendations reflect a comprehensive approach to gender mainstreaming, addressing both cultural and structural barriers to equality.

10.0 CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The study set out to evaluate the Amahlathi Local Municipality's commitment to integrating gender perspectives into development policies and programs. It aimed to assess how well these efforts align with global and regional frameworks, such as the Beijing Declaration, the Sustainable Development Goals, the African Union's Agenda 2063, and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. Additionally, the research sought to identify challenges and obstacles to effective gender mainstreaming within the municipality. The study discovered that while the Amahlathi Local Municipality has made progress in incorporating gender perspectives, significant challenges remain. These include sporadic policy implementation, incomplete integration of gender considerations, entrenched cultural norms resistant to change, resource limitations, and institutional resistance, particularly in areas like gender-responsive budgeting and women's representation in decision-making roles. However, there was also evidence of progress, such as breaking gender stereotypes in sports and the positive impact of employment equity policies. Based on these findings, the study concluded that despite ongoing challenges, there is potential for significant progress in gender mainstreaming within the municipality. Recommendations include focusing on empowerment through education by engaging in workshops and programs that promote gender equality and challenge traditional roles, continuing active participation in community initiatives, and advocating for gender-responsive budgeting and increased representation to foster inclusivity. Communities should support local programs that challenge traditional gender roles, promote inclusivity, and advocate for better resource allocation. Organizations are advised to implement comprehensive gender-responsive policies, including healthcare and economic development, and invest in capacity-building programs. Governments need to strengthen the implementation and monitoring of gender mainstreaming policies to align with global frameworks and undertake legal and institutional reforms to address cultural norms and resistance. Future researchers should explore the intersectionality in gender mainstreaming and conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term impact of gender strategies.

11.0 Declarations

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