

EXCHANGE PROGRAM

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

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**Gender Diversity, Inclusion and Equity  
Measures within the Zambia Supreme Audit  
Institution**

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## INTRODUCTION

Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity (DEI) have become defining elements of effective public-sector governance. For Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs), which exist to promote accountability, transparency, and prudent use of public resources, modelling DEI internally is essential to strengthening institutional legitimacy and performance. Modern oversight institutions are expected not only to audit governments but also to demonstrate good governance through their own leadership practices, internal policies, and organisational culture. As a result, SAIs worldwide increasingly recognise that meaningful inclusion—particularly the advancement of women into leadership—enhances decision-making, broadens institutional perspectives, and improves organisational resilience.

SAI-Zambia operates within this evolving global context. Anchored by frameworks such as ISSAI 12 on the Value and Benefits of SAIs, INTOSAI-P 50 on Principles of Professionalism, the AFROSAI-E Gender Mainstreaming Strategy, the Zambia National Gender Policy, and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on Gender Equality, the institution is obligated to ensure equitable participation in its leadership structures. These standards collectively highlight that gender-responsive leadership is not only a social objective, but also a performance-related requirement that enhances audit quality, institutional credibility, and the equitable oversight of public-service delivery.

As of the latest assessment, the SAI has 46 senior management positions—including the Auditor General, two Deputy Auditor Generals, 19 Directors, and 24 Assistant Directors—of which 15 (30%) are held by women. This representation indicates progress, especially against historical patterns of male-dominated leadership, but it also points to persistent gaps that require strategic attention. Leadership diversity within SAIs is increasingly recognised as a catalyst for improved audit planning, more inclusive risk assessments, and strengthened engagement with citizens.

This analytical reflection therefore aims to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based evaluation of the measures implemented by the SAI to advance DEI internally and externally. Drawing from institutional documents, global standards, and empirical findings from staff survey responses, the report examines achievements, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. The reflection also identifies practical, actionable recommendations for strengthening DEI—particularly the advancement of women into leadership—positioning DEI not as a compliance requirement, but as a strategic enabler of institutional excellence.

## DEVELOPMENT

The analysis of the topic included the following.

### i. Institutional Context and Current Leadership Representation

The Zambia SAI operates at the intersection of national accountability mandates and international expectations for professional, ethical, and inclusive governance. Nationally, the Zambia National Gender Policy and Public Service Management guidelines promote equitable representation in leadership positions across public institutions. Internationally, INTOSAI standards stress that SAIs should demonstrate integrity, fairness, and inclusiveness to maintain credibility and effectively serve citizens.

Within this broader context, the institution's leadership composition reflects both progress and challenges. Women hold 15 out of 46 senior management positions—representing 30 percent of leadership roles. While this figure surpasses historical norms and aligns with emerging regional trends, it highlights that women remain underrepresented at the most senior levels. This distribution affects visibility, influence in strategic decision-making, and the pace at which gender equality objectives are realised. Staff survey responses echoed this reality, with many noting positive improvements in representation but emphasising that more structured support is needed to sustain and accelerate progress.

### ii. Internal DEI Measures: Strengths and Areas Requiring Enhancement

The SAI has made notable efforts to advance DEI internally. These include gender-neutral recruitment policies, equal access to training and professional development, and expanded opportunities for women to serve on committees, technical task teams, and audit leadership roles. The institution's participation in external initiatives—such as the Women in Leadership Program—signals a growing commitment to cultivating inclusive leadership pipelines.

According to survey data, 71 percent of staff believe the institution demonstrates moderate to strong commitment to DEI. Respondents noted improvements in transparency, openness to female participation, and merit-based career progression. However, several gaps were evident. First, while opportunities exist, they are often not part of a structured, deliberate pathway that supports women's long-term career growth. Second, there is limited institutionalised mentorship and coaching for emerging female leaders. Third, DEI progress is not yet systematically measured, making it difficult to assess the impact of current initiatives.

### iii. Integration of DEI in Audit Practice

Externally, the SAI has taken steps to integrate gender-responsive approaches into audit processes, particularly in sectors that have direct social impact. However, these efforts remain inconsistent. Survey results indicate that 57 percent of staff believe gender considerations are integrated only occasionally in audit planning and execution. This inconsistency reflects broader

capacity gaps, including limited availability of standardised templates, tools, and training needed to fully operationalise gender-responsive auditing.

AFROSAI-E's Gender Mainstreaming Strategy encourages SAIs to embed gender considerations across the audit cycle—from planning to reporting—ensuring that public programs are assessed from an equity perspective. ISSAI 12 reinforces this by emphasising the need for SAIs to consider the differentiated experiences of citizens. SAI-Zambia has begun adopting these principles; however, further institutionalisation is required to ensure that gender analysis becomes a routine element of audit methodology rather than an occasional practice.

#### **iv. Effectiveness of Current DEI Measures: Perspectives from Staff Survey**

The survey responses collected provide valuable insights into institutional perceptions regarding DEI. Key findings include:

- 86% of staff believe women still face barriers to advancing into senior leadership roles.
- 71% stated that organisational culture continues to influence leadership progression.
- Respondents highlighted mentorship, visibility, and access to decision-making platforms as the most significant limitations affecting women.

These findings suggest that while the institution has made progress, women continue to experience structural and cultural challenges that impede progression. Many noted that although women are offered training opportunities, they are not always positioned for high-impact leadership exposure afterward. Respondents also highlighted the need for more deliberate, long-term interventions to support women's career development, including coaching, leadership rotations, and targeted capacity-building.

#### **v. Institutional Challenges Affecting DEI Advancement**

The reflection identifies several persistent challenges:

- Underrepresentation of women in top leadership roles, particularly at Director level which is standing at 4 women out of 19 directors representing 21%
- Limited formal mentorship and succession planning frameworks tailored to women.
- Uneven integration of gender considerations across audit departments.
- Cultural norms that may contribute to reduced confidence, limited visibility, or self-selection out of leadership pathways.
- Absence of structured monitoring tools to track DEI progress and representation trends.

These challenges require strategic interventions to ensure DEI is strengthened at both structural and cultural levels. Addressing them will enhance institutional effectiveness and support the SAI's alignment with international good practices.

#### **vi. Recommendations for Strengthening DEI within the SAI**

To accelerate DEI progress, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

- Establish a formal mentorship and leadership development program specifically targeting emerging female leaders.

- Integrate DEI performance indicators into leadership evaluations, departmental planning, and performance management.
- Institutionalise gender-responsive audit guidelines aligned with AFROSAI-E methodologies and ensure consistent use across directorates.
- Expand leadership coaching programs focusing on strategic decision-making, negotiation, confidence-building, and communication.
- Conduct regular DEI sensitisation workshops to address unconscious biases and strengthen inclusive organisational culture.
- Introduce an annual DEI performance review to assess progress, document achievements, and identify implementation gaps.

Together, these measures can transform DEI from a policy aspiration to a measurable institutional reality.

## CONCLUSION

SAI-Zambia has made important strides toward fostering diversity, inclusion, and equity within its workforce and leadership structures. The representation of women in 28 percent of senior positions demonstrates a positive shift, reflecting both institutional commitment and the growing recognition of women's essential contributions to audit leadership. However, survey evidence and institutional assessment reveal that challenges remain—particularly related to structured leadership development, mentorship, and the full integration of gender-responsive methods into audit practice.

Advancing DEI is not only consistent with international standards such as ISSAI 12 and INTOSAI-P 50, but also strengthens the SAI's credibility, audit quality, and strategic influence. By implementing deliberate, structured, and sustained measures—including mentorship pipelines, leadership capacity-building, gender-responsive audit methodologies, and DEI performance monitoring—the institution can continue moving toward a more inclusive and equitable future.

Embedding DEI into core organisational systems will help ensure that the SAI not only reflects national and international commitments to gender equality, but also serves as a leading example within the INTOSAI community. Through continued commitment and collective effort, the institution can achieve transformative progress that enhances governance, accountability, and service to the citizens of Zambia.

## REFERENCES

- INTOSAI-P 50: Principles of Professionalism
- ISSAI 12: The Value and Benefits of SAIs to Citizens
- AFROSAI-E Gender Mainstreaming Strategy
- Zambia National Gender Policy
- Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality