

Brigalia Bam was born on the 22 April 1933, in the former Transkei, Eastern Cape. She was formally educated in South Africa and abroad, specialising in teaching, social work, communications and management. A strong and wise leader during the overthrow of apartheid in South Africa, she continues to do pioneering work in the struggles against racism and sexism, both in South Africa and internationally.

Between 1999 and 2011, Bam was the Chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission and safely guided South Africa through a series of general and municipal elections. Between 1994 and 1998, she served as the Secretary-General of the South African Council of Churches. She has been the Africa Regional Secretary and Coordinator of the Women Workers Programme for the International Food and Allied Workers Association, the Coordinator of the YMCA's International Training Institute and Programme and the Executive Programme Secretary for the Women's Department of the World Council of Churches. She founded and is President of the Women's Development Foundation. Currently, she is the Chairperson of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference Electoral Commission Forum and serves on several company boards.

Brigalia Bam is a trained social worker and educationist, holding four honorary doctorates from various universities worldwide. She was the Chancellor of the former University of Port Elizabeth from 2000 to 2004 and the Chancellor of the Walter Sisulu University from 2007 to 2015. She received an honorary doctorate from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2005, in recognition of her contribution to enhancing the quality of life of the diverse communities of the Eastern Cape and South Africa.