

MULTI - SECTORAL APPROACH TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN AFRICA MANUAL

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United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Nature and Extent of Africa's Commitments on Women's Rights	4
- The Convention on the Elimination on All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	4
- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Charter)	5
- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa	6
- Millennium Development Goals	8
- SADC Protocol on Gender and Development	11
- Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children	11
- The International Bill of Rights and women's rights	12
- ILO Conventions on the Right to Work	12
- National protection of women's rights	12
Chapter Three: The Multi-Sectoral Approach towards Women's Rights	14
- Promoting women's rights and empowerment is a national priority	14
- Contribution of individual government departments to women's rights	15
- Coordination is the key to successful multi-sectoral initiatives	16
- Technical expertise is necessary	17
- Partnerships for the success of multi-sectoral initiatives	18
Chapter Four: Guidelines for Use of the Multi-Sectoral Approach	20
- Developing Political Will	20
- Establishing a High Level Coordination Mechanism	21
- Putting in place a Technical and Advisory Services Unit	24
- Developing operational plans by individual ministries	25
- Establishing an effective monitoring and accountability framework	28
- A multi-sectoral approach to periodic reporting	28
- Women's human rights in National Development Plans and budgets	30
- Gender Budgeting	31
- Developing Government-led partnerships with the United Nations system, development partners and civil society	32
Annexes	35

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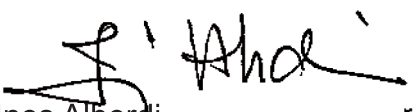
FOREWORD

In accordance with its mandate the United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM (part of UN Women)¹, has over the years supported initiatives that promote gender equality and women's rights and empowerment. A key lesson from UNIFEM's work is that eliminating discrimination against women and securing women's rights require the involvement of and gender responsive actions by different stakeholders, including Governments, civil society organizations and individuals in communities and households. Discrimination is pervasive at all levels and in all spheres of life.

The introduction of an implementation framework that proposes the integration of women's rights into all sectors of government and development endeavours is therefore welcome. A multi-sectoral approach to delivering on women's rights commitments reflects the reality that women's rights cut across all sectors and development priorities articulated in National Development Strategies. The adoption and use of such a multi-sectoral approach will represent significant progress in ensuring women's full enjoyment of their human rights.

The framework also calls for inter-ministerial coordination to ensure improved efficiency, accountability, and communication across sectors, the establishment of a strong technical and advisory services unit at the regional and national levels, and an important and strengthened role for national machineries for women's affairs. There already exist in some countries good practices in multi-sectoral approaches in a number of areas, including national strategies on HIV/AIDS, humanitarian emergencies and public health threats, such as in the case of avian flu.

Appropriate technical expertise to support the development of internal technical capacities by different sector ministries and in the coordination mechanism is an important element in successful multi-sectoral strategies. Finally, the acknowledgement of the important roles of Government-led partnerships—with the AU, with donor countries and agencies, with the United Nations system, and with various civil society actors, including international and regional human rights institutions, women's organizations, academic and research institutions, faith-based organizations, cultural leaders, and trade unions—highlights the fact that discrimination against women is and should be a society-wide concern.



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1. UNIFEM is now part of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women known as UN Women established by the UN General Assembly on 2 July 2010. UN Women comprises the Division the Advancement of Women (DAW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACHPR	African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
AU	African Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ILO	International Labour Organization
ECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDGEA	Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations Organization
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UN Women	UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
OHCHR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background - Endemic Gender Disparities

Women constitute the majority of the poor in Africa. They face widespread and endemic discrimination and persistent denial of their human rights. According to the Global Gender Gap Report of 2007, Sub-Saharan Africa has the second lowest score on gender indicators out of eight regions and has the lowest score in sectors such as education.¹ Indeed, it is well known that in sub-Saharan Africa women produce between 60% to 80% of the food, yet female-headed households are more likely to be poorer. Women are less likely to own land than men, and female landowners tend to own less land than their male counterparts. Furthermore, maternal mortality rates have barely changed over two decades.

The feminization of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, and high maternal mortality rates pose major threats to the attainment of gender equality and women's empowerment. Only three African countries feature in the top fifty countries with regard to health and survival of women worldwide². Women constitute the larger percentage of those infected and affected by the pandemic making up more than 60% of the adults and 75% of all young people living with HIV. In addition they have the burden of taking care of the sick and the ever growing numbers of orphaned children with minimal state support. This situation is aggravated by the intractable prevalence of gender-based violence typified by women battering, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and harmful traditional practices.

Although women constitute more than 50% of the African population, they are the least represented in leadership and decision-making positions. Only seven African countries feature in the top fifty of the featured one hundred and twenty eight³ with regard to political empowerment. Women's participation in governance, democracy and electoral processes at national levels remains limited with an overall percentage of 14.9% across Africa. This indicator is far below the gender parity that African leaders have committed to achieve.

Conflicts in many parts of Africa continue to unleash untold suffering among many peoples of the continent with women and children bearing the brunt of such conflicts. Women and children constitute the majority of the displaced persons and refugees in conflict situations yet their role in conflict prevention, management and resolution continues to be undermined in spite of international and regional commitments on gender equality in peace processes.

These statistics should be of concern not only to African governments who have committed to promoting gender equality and women's rights, but also to other stakeholders including development partner countries, the United Nations System, and civil society organizations. Gender inequality is increasingly being recognized as a hindrance to the overall national and regional growth and sustainable development.⁴

A recent study of the World Bank made the correlations between gender and development and found that⁵:

The relationship between the incidence of poverty and the level of gender equality suggests that developing countries with higher gender equality tend to have lower poverty rates;

1 Global Gender Gap Report (2007), World Economic Forum.

2 Id.

3 Id.

4 World Bank (2007): Gender Equality as Smart Economics (A World Bank Group Gender Action Plan (2007 -10) at p. 2

5 Morrison, Raju & Sinha (2007): Gender Equality, Poverty and Economic Growth (World Bank).

Increases in female earnings can, on the one hand, reduce current poverty and stimulate short-term growth through higher consumption expenditures, and, on the other hand, reduce future poverty and stimulate long-term growth through higher savings;

Greater gender equality under the law, including legal rights of women to own assets such as land and property, the right to move freely outside the home and to participate in various markets, and women's rights within marriage can boost growth by increasing women's productivity;

Increases in maternal education and control over household resource allocation improve child well-being, educational attainment and health which in turn, lead to increases in children's cognitive ability and productivity as adults.

The dismal progress on women's rights is particularly of concern in light of the fact that many African governments, by ratifying international and regional human rights treaties, have made the commitment to respect, promote and protect women's rights and to eliminate discrimination against women. While some efforts have been made such as the establishment of women's machineries and the introduction of gender focal points in many ministries, translation of these commitments in national laws, policies and programmes remains a challenge in the few countries. Even where gender equality goals are expressed in national poverty reduction and sector strategies, they begin to "evaporate" as the strategies are developed into concrete plans, formulated into budgets and implemented on the ground.

One of the major challenges to the realization and enjoyment of rights by women is that the responsibility for women's rights and empowerment has been laid exclusively at the feet of national women's machineries. They have had to work without effective collaboration and synergy from other sectors and ministries which equally have a role to play in ensuring the protection of women's rights. Yet, the machineries often have limited resources and political power to effectively support sectors ministries to fulfil their respective commitments on women's rights.

Purpose of the Handbook

As a response, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has developed a framework for a multi-sectoral approach to fast tracking the commitments on women's rights by African governments' into real positive changes for women in urban and rural areas. This Handbook has been developed to introduce the multi-sectoral approach to women's rights, and to provide practical guidance to support the adoption and use of the approach at different levels, including national and local levels. More specifically the Handbook will enable the user to clearly identify which human rights instruments a country has committed to and the specific obligations with respect to women's rights. Subsequently and more importantly, this is a resource that aims to guide countries and their development partners through a series of steps or roadmap towards adopting and operationalising a multi-sectoral approach to sustained actions to secure women's rights, and in monitoring and reporting on the progress made, in accordance with the requirements of CEDAW and the AU Protocol on women's rights in Africa, as well as the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa.

Intended Audience

The realization of women's rights requires the combined and complementary effort of different stakeholders, including governments, civil society organizations and other non-state actors, development partners including donor countries/agencies, and the United Nations System. Below is a brief note on the different user categories:

Government

The intended users of this Handbook are governments who are the primary duty bearers under the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to the rights of Women in Africa, CEDAW and other human rights instruments. They are also charged with guiding and facilitating sustainable development, towards which women's rights and gender equality are critical. The Handbook provides a step by step guide on how to use the multi-sector approach to facilitate government system-wide actions in favour of women's rights and empowerment. In this way, all sectors and ministries in government, not just the women's machineries, contribute to the realization of women's rights thereby fast tracking delivery on commitments under the AU Protocol and CEDAW.

Development Partners

This Handbook is also intended for development partners who are important supporters of the national development efforts in Africa. Many have sector programmes in which they work with central and local government, civil society organizations, and communities to achieve agreed upon objectives. They have an obligation to support their sector local partners, government or non-government, to integrate women's rights and empowerment in their policies, programmes and activities. Many development partners will already have institutional policies and guidelines for mainstreaming gender. This Handbook will serve as a useful complement to their respective existing tools.

Civil Society

The Handbook will also be a useful resource for civil society organizations (CSOs) including women's rights advocacy organizations, and community-based groups in their partnership with government, and in their advocacy for the promotion and protection of women's rights. They may use some of the practical suggestions provided in the Handbook as a means of providing concrete recommendations to Governments. There are CSOs in almost all sectors including sectors that are not normally associated with the promotion of women's rights. This Handbook can support such CSOs to integrate women's rights advocacy in their work.

How the Handbook is organized

The Handbook is organized into four chapters. After this introductory chapter, the second chapter provides an overview of key commitments that African governments have made with respect to women's human rights including under the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), the Protocol to the ACHPR on the Rights of Women in Africa, CEDAW, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on Gender Equality. The third chapter introduces and

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