DRAFT

GENDER STRATEGY FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN MAURITIUS

AIM
The aim of this strategy is to give effect to government commitments to gender equality at the local level through a series of practical steps for ensuring that gender is mainstreamed in and through local government.

CONTEXT AND CONCEPTS

Gender
Gender refers to the different societal expectations norms and values ascribed to women and men, boys and girls in a particular society and culture.

Gender stereotyping
Gender stereotypes refers to the way that society expects women and men to behave and the roles they are expected to play. These stereotypes often define women and men in opposite ways; are limiting to both women and men and legitimise unequal power relations. They are expressed, for example in the gender division of labour.

Women and men in Mauritius
Although women constitute 51 percent of the population of Mauritius and are equally represented at all educational levels, they remain secondary citizens in all spheres—political, social, and economic. Women constitute 17% of members of parliament and only 6.4% of councillors.

While the country has experienced an increased percentage of women in its labour force from 25% in 1972 to 35.6% in 2005, over the last fifteen years the unemployment rate for women has increased from 4.9% to 16.5% (compared to 5.8% in the case of men). Women continue to be concentrated in low skilled and low paying jobs. According to a recent time use survey women in Mauritius earn, on average, 36% less than men (UNDP and Ministry of Women’s Rights, 2005). The gap is 44% in the rural areas compared to 28% in urban regions. The study found that while the unaccounted for contribution of women to the economy is 11.3% to 24.1% that for men is 3.9% 6.6%. This is because most of the work that women perform in the home and in the community is not remunerated. Overall, mothers spend 4 to 5 times more than fathers on household work.

The recent Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP 2005) showed that women constitute only 22% of news sources in Mauritius and are frequently portrayed either as sex objects or as victims of violence while men are portrayed in a broad range of roles.
Recent media coverage attests to the daily increase in cases of Gender Based Violence (GBV). HIV and AIDS is a major threat to Mauritius. Although the main source of transmission began as (mainly male) intravenous drug users HIV is increasingly being spread through heterosexual intercourse. As in other Southern African countries the proportion of women infected is rapidly increasing. Women bear a disproportionate burden of care for those living with HIV and AIDS – an example of the unwaged care provided by women.

**Gender equality and equity**

Gender equality concerns ensuring equal opportunities for women and men to enjoy their human rights. Gender equity is about equality of outcome and results. It is a stronger concept that equality of opportunity. It means that women and men, boys and girls have an equal chance of reaching the finishing line, not just an equal chance of being at the starting line.

**Commitments to gender equality and equity**

Key national, regional and international commitments made by Mauritius to achieving gender equality include:

- The Constitution which outlaws discrimination based on sex among the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals.
- The Sex Discrimination Act No 43 of 2002 that provides for “special measures to achieve equality”, including measures to ensure “substantive equality between men and women.”
- The National Gender Policy that is currently under review and in which it is recommended that this strategy for mainstreaming gender at local level be specifically mentioned and affirmed.
- The Southern African Development Community Declaration on Gender and Development and the draft Protocol on Gender and Development to be presented to Heads of State in August 2007. The latter sets a target of 50% women in all areas and at all levels of decision making by 2015.
- Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
- International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government.

**Gender mainstreaming**

The above commit Mauritius to ensure that gender is mainstreamed in all areas and at all levels of government. In July 1997, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defined gender mainstreaming as:

“The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men can benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.”
Practical and strategic gender needs
Gender mainstreaming aims to ensure that both practical and strategic gender needs are addressed. Practical gender needs are related to daily needs and activities. They are linked to roles that women and men are given by society. Strategic gender needs are related to changing the relationships, roles and responsibilities of women and men in society.

Gender blind and gender aware policies and practices
Gender blind policies ignore the different situations, roles, needs and interests of women, men, boys and girls. Gender aware policies consider gender as a way of reaching set development goals by addressing gender norms, roles and access to resources.

Access, participation and transformation:
For women to make a difference, they must have access to decision-making structures. Often this involves taking special measures to overcome the societal barriers that have prevented women from being present, such as quotas. Further measures need to be taken to assure women’s effective participation. If women are present and they participate actively, this will be reflected both in the way that institutions function (for example their meeting times; norms and discourse) as well as in the way services are delivered. Women bring with them new ideas and agendas, as well as different perspectives on traditional concerns. These make for more responsive governance. Thus it is not only the democratic right of women to be equally represented in decision-making but also critical to more effective governance.

GOVERNANCE
Representation

Key issues
Mauritius has nine geographical districts. Local government comprises five municipal councils in the urban areas, and four district councils with a lower tier of 124 village councils in the rural areas.

Local authorities in Mauritius are guided by the Local Government Act 1989. Only a few sections of the Local Government Act 2003 have been proclaimed. Both Local Government Acts 1989 and 2003 are silent on gender issues.

At 6.4% representation of women at local level is the second lowest in the SADC region (after Angola). There is higher representation of women at municipal level than village and district level where women’s representation is the lowest due to the stronger concentration of patriarchal forces at this level.

Women in local government in Mauritius 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Women</th>
<th>% Women</th>
<th>% Women</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parliament</td>
<td>municipalities</td>
<td>district councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior to 2005</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July, October and December 2005 Elections</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: GL 2007

Although a multi ethnic society, culture and especially religion play a pivotal role in every day life. The First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system aggravates the constraints faced by women. While the Labour Party, part of the ruling Social Alliance (AS), has a quota of 30% women within the party there is no legislated quota for women in area of political representation in Mauritius. Proposals by the Sachs Commission on Constitutional and Electoral Reform to change the electoral system to a mixed Proportional Representation/FPTP system, partly to make the electoral system more accessible to women, have not been acted upon.
Women in leadership positions in Mauritius 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% women in council</th>
<th>Total Mayors/Chairpersons</th>
<th>No women</th>
<th>% women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Municipal</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2**</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

** Elected in November 2006

While women now comprise 40% of the mayors in Mauritius, they constitute only 5.6% of the village council and none of the district council chairs. There are no women participating in the four standing committees of the district councils. Very few women chair committees of local government. Where they do these are mostly in areas traditionally associated with women such as social, cultural and development committees. There are no women chairs of infrastructure-related committees (Lowe Morna and Tolmay, 2007).

No special measures have been taken to increase the representation of women in decision-making in Mauritius. Local government has been neglected as evidenced by the fact that the number of women at national level increased from 5.6% to 17% in the 2005 elections whereas the proportion of women in local government remained very low.

**Strategies**

If Mauritius is to meet its obligations as a member of SADC urgent measures need to be put in place. These include:

- A legislated quota of 50% women to be incorporated by political parties into their Constitutions.
- Awareness raising; training and sensitisation.
- Media campaigns.
- Mobilisation by women themselves.

**Participation**

**Key issues**

At the Coalface, Gender and Local Government, the first comprehensive study of gender in local government in Southern Africa found that women make little to no contribution to discussions in council meetings in Mauritius. Where they do make interventions or ask questions they lack support because there are few other women in the council and the men override their suggestions.

Generally, women at local level are disempowered because they lack experience and knowledge of the workings of local government. While men have gained experience through serving several terms, women are often in these positions for the first time. Meeting times of councils are often after hours when women have conflicting responsibilities at home.
It is usually only the few women in top positions like the two women mayors and chairpersons of village councils that are confident enough to speak during meetings. However, decisions are often taken in other forums like sub-committees before council meetings leaving little room for active engagement and debate.

**Strategies**
- Increasing the number of women in local government will help to build the confidence of women councillors to speak out.
- Measures to ensure that women with experience in local government are retained as new women are brought in.
- Targets and positive discrimination to ensure equal representation of women in the leadership positions of local government (for example if the mayor is a man, the deputy mayor should be a woman and vice versa).
- Provide councillors with remuneration and travelling allowances to enable them to carry out their mandate more effectively.
- Training for all councillors, especially new women councillors, regarding the various procedures, acts, duties and responsibilities and workings of local government.
- Efforts by women councillors to become better acquainted with the workings of local government so that they can actively participate in meetings.
- Moral support to women.
- Changing the mindsets of men; gender sensitivity training for male councillors.
- Defining the role of district councillors vis-à-vis chairpersons of village councils as these are often dominated by district councillors.
- Reviewing the meeting times of local authorities to be more family friendly.
- Providing child care facilities during meetings.
- Win-win solutions that empower women and ensure acceptance by men.

**Public participation**

**Key issues**
Some councils have gender disaggregated data on their communities while others do not. Local government does not at present convene many public meetings. Women do campaign work for men but do not participate visibly during election campaigns.

**Strategies**
- Create more forums for public participation in the work of local government.
- Encourage women to participate actively in these forums as they are an important training and recruiting ground for women in local government, and will help to ensure greater gender awareness and sensitivity in the work of local government.

**PLANNING**

**Key issues**
The vision and mission statements of local authorities are gender blind. Women tend not to be consulted about their needs in the drawing up of plans because they are mostly devised in sub-committees where there are mostly male councillors. Information has not been collected from women about their constraints, opportunities, incentives and needs. Gender indicators have not been included in the plans of local government. Customer satisfaction surveys are not conducted and there is no gender disaggregated data on levels of satisfaction with the services rendered by local government.

**Strategies**
- Vision and mission statements of local authorities should be gender aware.
- Surveys should be conducted prior to planning to determine what women and men in communities need and want.
- Women and men should be consulted in the drawing up of local government plans.
- All units and departments should be required to include gender indicators in their business plans.
- Municipalities and councils should administer customer satisfaction surveys that are disaggregated and analysed according to gender.

**GENDER-SPECIFIC PROGRAMMES**

**General**
In any gender mainstreaming endeavour it is important both to have gender specific programmes that give visibility to, and help to mobilise around gender issues, as well as ensure that gender is taken into account in all programmes.

There are currently very few gender oriented programmes in local government. However, local government has an important responsibility for early learning, and this has significant gender dimensions, since affordable child care frees women to participate in the labour force. Local government could also potentially play a significant role in mounting campaigns and taking action to end gender violence. These are immediate action areas that would help to raise the profile of gender in local government.

**Education**

**Key issues**
Almost all local authorities provide kindergarten and nursery facilities free of charge (in addition to optional fee paying private facilities). However, 1) not all local authorities provide these facilities 2) there are no facilities for children from 0-3 years old and there is no 3) after school care including school holidays. The former results in women having to take off from work for longer than their maternity leave period, affecting career prospects, or leaving children with their grandparents. The latter often results in women working part-time because they have nowhere to send their children after school. Alternatively, they leave children with their grandparents. In Beau Basin Rose Hill the local authority provides a centre where parents can leave their children when they have to go shopping etc.
The other key area of local government is in informal and vocational training. This often reinforces gender stereotypes (for example sewing and cookery classes for women, IT for men) but could be used to challenge the gender division of labour.

**Strategies**
- Ensure that all local authorities provide pre-school facilities.
- Extend pre school facilities to include 0-3 year old children and after school care including school holidays.
- Replicate the best practice in Beau Basin Rose Hill of child care centres that relieve pressure on working parents and on grandparents who often bear the brunt of child care for working parents.
- Design informal and vocational training courses that challenge gender stereotypes.

**Safety and security: Localising the National Action Plan on Gender Violence**

**Key issues**
As witnessed in daily news reports, violence against women is increasing every day, revealing new cases and forms of rape, thefts, crime and abuse including the elderly and handicapped. Women can no longer walk safely in many neighbourhoods either during the day or night. Community/police relations are enhanced through the Comité de Vigilance but this is not enough.

**Strategies**
- Localising of the National Action Plan on Gender Violence.
- Participating in the Sixteen Days of Activism campaign, including the “Take Back the Night” campaign on a continuous basis with partners such as Media Watch Organisation.
- Reclaiming spaces that have become unsafe through community action.
- Providing more recreational facilities such as sports grounds, parks, gardens and multi purpose centres.
- Ensuring adequate street lighting.
- Sensitisation campaigns in partnership with specialised agencies, such as talks for school children and counselling sessions for couples.
- Strengthening police/community relations.
- Supporting places of safety for women who are abused, and referring them to agencies that can assist with after care services, finding housing and employment.

**MAINSTREAMING GENDER INTO EXISTING PROGRAMMES**

**Economic opportunities and job creation**

**Key issues**
In any society local government is an important creator of jobs as well as generator of economic opportunities through its own procurement and
programmes relating to small and medium scale enterprise. Women have not been major beneficiaries of these opportunities. The majority of municipal employees are men and there is a visible gender division of labour in local government (for example almost all engineers, refuse removal and construction workers are men, while cleaners and those cutting grass on the side of the road are women. Contracts are generally awarded to large male owned companies. Women often do not benefit from programmes to support small and medium scale enterprises because they are not aware of these or the programmes are not geared to their needs.

**Strategies**
- Setting and monitoring specific targets to ensure gender parity in employment opportunities created by local government.
- Organising and training women within their communities to be better placed to benefit from economic opportunities in collaboration with appropriate specialised agencies such as Small Entrepreneur and Handicraft Development Authority (SEHDA.)
- Creating a vote item in the budgets of local government especially related to women’s empowerment.
- Allocate space for the exhibition, marketing and sale of goods and products produced by women to empower them economically.
- Keep and analyse gender disaggregated data on the awarding of contracts.
- Women suppliers of goods and services should be informed of opportunities through force vives, NGOs etc and be trained in how to submit tenders. This would enable them to be on the official list of suppliers.
- Study best practices from other countries eg South Africa on positive discrimination for women and other marginalised groups in the awarding of tenders. Make use of the provisions in the Sex Discrimination Act for positive discrimination in favour of women contractors until the playing field is level, ie male and female led enterprises have equal access to tenders.
- Encourage and affirm larger companies that sub-contract women-owned enterprises.

**Infrastructure**

**Key issues**
Local government statistics on housing and households are not disaggregated by sex. It is therefore not possible to determine the extent to which women own their own houses or benefit equally from local government housing schemes. Lighting and safe transport are key security considerations for women. On average women are more likely to use public transport than men. In Mauritius local government’s main responsibility with regard to transport is roads.

**Strategies**
- Disaggregate and analyse data on housing according to sex.
Set and monitor target for ensuring that women have equal opportunities to become home owners.

Provide safe public transport, traffic centres and public toilets at transport centres and in markets.

Request regular patrols, especially in remote areas.

Provide and improve infrastructure, for example lighting, maintenance of roads.

Make request to NTA through MLG for recruitment of more female drivers.

**Health, environment, HIV and AIDS**

**Key issues**

Local government is responsible for health indirectly through refuse removal and provision of sanitation. The Scavenging Service is responsible for the collection and disposal of refuse. Local government is responsible for the maintenance of drains; weeding and herbiciding; ensuring a healthy and hygienic environment for markets and fairs, especially the sale of vegetables and fast foods and ensuring that norms and standards are abided by in connection with the Food Act and other regulations. These are all issues of key importance to women in communities.

Yet often women are not consulted in matters like the management of waste. Most refuse collectors are men. Almost all environmental health inspectors are men. Environmental health is the concern of one and all. This has been demonstrated time and again such as after the post cyclone and during the anti chikungunya campaign.

Because it is close to the people, local government has an important role to play in the prevention of HIV and AIDS, for example providing logistic facilities and financial contribution to special events like International Day Against Drug Abuse.

**Strategies**

- Create environment committees in which women and men are equally represented.
- Create forum for engaging with the public on environment and health issues in which women and men participate equally.
- Increase the frequency of health services and collection of refuse.
- Provide and maintain more public toilets.
- Allocate special funds in the budgets of local authorities for addressing HIV and AIDS is increasing and affecting more young girls and women.
- Mount HIV and AIDS prevention and awareness campaigns to target different groups, for example school children; women’s associations and pressure groups.

**Social development**

**Key issues**
Social development is one of the main functions of the local authorities. In the absence of gender disaggregated data and analysis it is difficult to assess how gender responsive these programmes are, for example to what extent women and men benefit equally from social halls, sports facilities, museums and libraries. All of these provide opportunities for challenging gender stereotypes.

**Strategies**

- Renting out of social halls for functions at reasonable rates to ease the burden that often falls on women of organising large family and community events.
- Setting up cyber centres in libraries and designing training for women and men of all ages in use of IT.
- Ensuring that every library has a section on women’s literature.
- Mobile libraries for making books and reading more accessible to all including rural communities and women who often do not have time to spend in libraries.
- Collection of gender disaggregated data on use of local authority facilities and ensuring that women and men benefit equally from these facilities, especially sports grounds and recreational centres.
- Designing programmes to ensure that women and men benefit equally from local authority facilities, for example promoting women in traditionally male sports.
- Renaming of centres such as the Women’s Centres to Family Centres so that women and men have easy access to these, and men are encouraged to become more involved in family activities.
- Programmes to encourage challenging of gender stereotypes in the home, for example boys and girls being given the same exposure and performing equal tasks across the gender divide.

**EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AND ENVIRONMENT**

**Patterns and policies**

**Key issues**

Although comprehensive statistics are yet to be compiled, the “gender division of labour” is glaringly apparent in the staff composition of local government. There are no women in the top management echelons of local government. Women comprise approximately 30 percent of middle and senior management. Women comprise the majority of the secretarial/clerical staff.

No targets have been set for achieving gender balance in all areas and at all levels of local government by 2015, as required by the forthcoming SADC Gender Protocol on Gender and Development.

Although there is no discrimination in recruitment (in other words jobs women and men are equally eligible to apply for different posts advertised) there has been no “positive discrimination” to bridge gender gaps where these exist (for example openly encouraging women to apply for more senior management
posts, or giving preference to women where a woman and a man may be equally qualified).

There are no data banks on women to assist in recruiting and head hunting. There is no policy stipulating that interview panels should be gender balanced and that questions should not indirectly discriminate against women (eg how many children do you have; will you be able to travel etc). There are no policies in place for ensuring that women enter more senior management positions, for example talent spotting, fast tracking, coaching and mentoring etc.

**Strategies**

- All local authorities to set targets for achieving gender balance in all areas and at all levels by 2015 in their administrations.
- Develop policies to ensure that these targets are met, including affirmative action policies; recruitment and selection practices; and policies designed to break the “glass ceiling” for women in local government.

**Working conditions and environment**

**Key issues**

There is no salary discrimination for women and men at the same level in local government but men often earn more because they are in more senior positions; in higher paying areas (for example in technical rather than administrative fields) are on full time as opposed to part time contracts; and have more years of uninterrupted service.

Paid maternity leave is compulsory but paternity leave is still under negotiation. Local authorities do not make provision for flexi time for their staff despite advances in information technology that would make it possible for some work to be done at home. None of the local authorities have child care facilities or policies. They also do not have policies to address sexual harassment, despite the existence of this problem.

**Key strategies**

- Introduce paternity leave.
- Introduce flexi time.
- Ensure that all local authorities have well defined policies on sexual harassment.
- Provide child care facilities at the work place of local authorities and during council meetings.
- As far as possible take residential considerations into account in the promotion of women so that their place of work is not too far from home.

**GENDER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

A Gender Management System (GMS) is “the network of structures, mechanisms and processes put in place within an existing organisational framework to guide,
plan, monitor and evaluate the process of mainstreaming gender in all areas of the organisations work, in order to achieve greater gender equality and equity.”

(Commonwealth Secretariat)

**Gender structures**

**Key issues**

The Commonwealth GMS describes the National Gender Machinery (NGM) as the body or system of bodies recognised by the government as the institution dealing with the promotion of gender equality. In Mauritius the body for coordinating gender mainstreaming is the Ministry of Women’s Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection. However, because gender mainstreaming can only become a reality if gender is being systematically taken into account in all spheres and at all levels, the Ministry needs to work with gender focal points or units in all ministries. Similarly gender focal points or units need to be established and coordinated in local government, and this coordinating structure needs to liaise with the Ministry of Women’s Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection. At present there are no gender structures in local government.

**Strategies**

- Strengthen the gender unit in the Ministry of Local Government to coordinate gender mainstreaming in all areas of local government and to liaise with the Ministry of Women’s Rights, Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection and all other relevant ministries.
- Ensure that there is a gender focal point in each standing committee of local authorities. These focal points will be responsible for ensuring that gender is mainstreamed in all the work of local authorities. Together they will constitute a Gender Task Force for the local authority.
- Identify and empower political champions of gender mainstreaming in local government.
- Ensure that gender mainstreaming responsibilities are acknowledged, rewarded and remunerated as part of human resource management systems including through job descriptions, performance agreements and remuneration related bonuses.

**Budgets, monitoring and evaluation**

**Key issues**

An important test of gender mainstreaming is the extent to which this is reflected in budgets. At present the budgets of local authorities are gender blind. They do not reflect any specific allocations for promoting the equal status of women and men in society (for example specific budget lines for ending gender violence; women’s empowerment funds etc).

There is little public participation in budget processes. Overall allocations are not informed by gender analysis. Many of these allocations, while appearing to be gender neutral, mask gender disparities. For example a high proportion of the allocations are to salaries. But the majority of municipal employees especially at
a senior level and in the higher paying occupational categories are men. Gender analysis of allocations in areas like sports facilities would most likely reveal that women and men are not equal beneficiaries.

Gender analysis of budgets can only be carried out if gender disaggregated statistics are kept in all areas of local government work—employment, procurement, programmes. At present this is not the case. This data is also critical for setting targets and indicators and measuring progress towards the achievement of gender equality in local government.

**Strategies**

- Management of local authorities to ensure that all data is disaggregated and analysed according to gender.
- Gender indicators to be built into Key Performance Indicators of local government programmes and HR management.
- Women and men to participate equally in public consultations on planning and budgets.
- A specific budget line for advancing the status of women (including fighting gender violence and HIV and AIDS.)
- Gender analysis to be applied to all budget allocations to ensure that expenditure is gender sensitive and responds equally to the needs of women and men.

**Capacity building**

**Key issues**

Councillors do not receive any training when they are appointed and this is one of the reasons given for the low participation at the local level; in most cases councillors do not understand their roles and duties. They require technical training on the relevant Acts and their mandate.

The difference for men however is that they have had more experience and exposure as many of them are in their second and third terms. No capacity building is given to new councillors. There is no gender sensitivity, awareness or analysis training offered to councillors.

**Strategies**

- Gender awareness campaigns within local government and in the community.
- Training programmes for new councillors, especially women who have not had the same experience and exposure of men.
- Ongoing mentorship and support, through linkages with civil society.
- Gender sensitivity training for both male and female councillors.
- Gender analysis training for councillors and staff with specific gender mainstreaming responsibilities.