



Republic of Mauritius

Ministry of Local Government

GENDER POLICY



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Gender Policy Document

1. Introduction

The World Bank chose “Gender Equality and Development” as the main focus/theme for its World Development Report 2012. This is perhaps testimony to the fact that there is a growing realisation and acceptance of the fact that ‘gender’ is a critical and crosscutting issue for development. In other words, if policies and programmes are not gender- focused, societies will lag behind, both in terms of efficiency and equity. While gender inequality is recognized as an important factor of inefficiency, it is important not to overemphasize gender’s ‘instrumental’ value but also to pay due attention to its intrinsic value in line with a ‘rights’ approach to development.

While the world has achieved progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment under the Millennium Development Goals (including equal access to primary education between girls and boys), women and girls still continue to suffer discrimination and violence in many parts of the world.

Empowering women and promoting gender equality is crucial to accelerating sustainable development. Ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right, but it also has a multiplier effect across all other development areas.

In September 2015, countries adopted a set of goals to **end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all** as part of a new sustainable development agenda. Each goal has specific targets to be achieved over the next 15 years.

Sustainable Development Goal 5 targets to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls because gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health-care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large.

Mauritius has, compared to many other countries, made good progress on the status and advancement of women. But despite progress made, there is still a lot more work that needs to be done for a true empowerment of women. There is a need for more specific action regarding gender equality, so that progress achieved so far on women's advancement is not eroded. In times of crisis, such a risk does exist. The widening of opportunities for women and preventing the dwindling of gains achieved depends largely on the measures and policies that are formulated and adopted with the view to furthering women's empowerment and preventing their disempowerment. The Local Government sector, like many other organisations, has a key role to play in this context.

2. Anchoring Gender Perspectives Nationally

In the National Gender Policy Framework (NGPF) of 2008, it is clearly stated that the :

“new NGP is first and foremost a generic policy document, drafted in line with programme-based budgeting and performance management initiatives of the Government, that calls upon various entities to take ownership of the process of designing their own respective gender policies using a participatory approach.”

While the intention of sustaining policies and programmes from a gender perspective is laudatory and the formulation of sectoral Gender Policies (SGP) can assist with the development and consolidation of gender equitable societies, a lot more will depend on their implementation. SGP can go a long way in giving credence to the vision that government has of the society- a vision which is aptly captures by the National Gender Policy framework. The latter’s vision statement reads as follows:

“A society in which all girls and boys, women and men live together in dignity, safety, mutual respect, harmony and social justice; thrive in an enabling environment in which they are able to achieve their full potential, in full enjoyment of their human rights; are equal partners in taking decisions to shape economic, social and cultural development, in determining the values that guide and sustain such development and equally enjoy its benefits.”

Such a vision highlights the progressive nature of Mauritian society and the democratic values that it upholds but implementing such a vision requires the involvement of a multiplicity of stakeholders and a more coordinated approach. The development of a sectoral gender policy is a good starting point. Each Ministry and organization, can, through its SGP, bring a building block to the gender mainstreaming process and assist in turning the society into a more equal and just one. But as the NGPF notes: “.....*there are gender issues that are specific and unique to a sector, organisation or agency. Each sector and agency has to be responsible for and take ownership of the development of their own policy.*”

Taking ‘ownership’ requires that there is enough understanding and appreciation of the gender issues pertaining to the specific organisations as well as how they impact and/or are being impacted upon by other processes. Consultations with the stakeholders and a well-designed methodology, based on a participatory process, can enhance the sense of ownership. The methodology used in designing this policy was also very participatory.

All Ministries/organisations subscribe generally to the values encapsulated in the National Gender Policy Framework but their capacity, know-how and skills to embrace these values and ensure that policies adopted and implemented are gender sensitive remains low. Often, Ministries and organisations believe that their policies and practices are gender neutral since there is no overt discrimination whatsoever between men and women but the reality, however, is that discriminations and inequality, may in some areas, persist. The latter are so subtle at times that they go unnoticed.

In the Government Programme 2015-2019, a number of measures has been announced to empower women-

- *New legislation will be brought forward to provide more protection and security to the elderly, women, children and physically handicapped. Penalties for offenders will be substantially increased.*
- *The Back to Work Programme will be implemented to facilitate women wishing to take up or resume employment.*
- *Government will strengthen legislation on women, children, community care and protection.*
- *Our electoral system will be reformed to introduce a dose of proportional representation in the National Assembly and guarantee better women representation.*
- *Government will set up a National Coalition against Domestic Violence Committee under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office. The Committee will liaise with the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity and Reforms Institutions to ensure that victims of domestic violence are given immediate shelter in a Government institution and provided with a job and a house within a reasonable time frame to lead a normal life anew.*

3. Objectives of Sectoral Gender Policy

The objectives of the Sectoral Gender Policy include:

- (i) identification of the key concerns and issues of the Ministry concerned from a gender perspective;
- (ii) highlighting the gender blindness of the Ministry where and if it exists;
- (iii) ensuring the budgeting is done with gender lenses;
- (iv) identification of the key gaps in training needs of the Ministry from a gender perspective;
- (v) assist with the collection of gender disaggregated data pertinent to the different programs, projects and schemes of the country;
- (vi) unshackling different structures of patriarchy and move in the direction of a more just society;
- (vii) ensure a more effective utilization of resources from a gender perspective and thus help achieve SDG 5 – that of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls; and
- (viii) facilitation of a more effective gender mainstreaming.

4. International Conventions and Legislations

Mauritius has signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action and the SADC gender protocol. Through its different Ministries which are largely responsible for the formulation and implementation of a broad set of policies, designed to promote the welfare of citizens and promote overall efficiency, the Government can go a long way in making the ratification of CEDAW more meaningful and the attainment of SDC goal 5 a

reality. But Mauritius, like many other countries, suffers from entrenched patriarchal syndrome within its different structures, thus making the transformation of the society into a gender equitable one a rather difficult task. This does not imply that Mauritius is static. A lot of progress has, in fact, been made. However, the mechanisms/instruments which can assist in making legislations effective on the ground are still limited and/or absent, thus making implementation a challenging task. And to compound this situation, capacity in the field of gender and gender applications remain weak.

The different stakeholders/actors, while well intentioned and desirous of a non-discriminatory society, are often unaware of how oppressive societies can be. Women are often not treated as full fledged citizens. Having equal rights on paper do not necessarily translate into effective practice on the ground. Subtle discriminatory mechanisms rooted in patriarchal norms and values continue to pervade peoples' lives at a macro, meso and micro level.

5. Gender Discrimination and Male Bias

Gender discrimination in an organisation may operate at various levels, often as a result of male bias. Diane Elson (1991) defines male bias as:

“a bias that operates in favour of men as a gender, and against women as a gender, not that all men are biased against women. Some men have contributed substantially to the diagnosis an understanding of male bias and have campaigned to overcome it. Some women show little understanding of the operation of male bias and do much to perpetuate it.”

Male biases are prevalent in diverse sectors leading to different kinds of obstacles to women's empowerment. Political support is central to women's empowerment within the local government arena but compared to a number of other countries, progress has been slow in this field.

Many institutions, including Ministries/organizations working for the advancement of the country and for the betterment of service delivery and the best interest of the citizens, are not even aware of CEDAW and its ramifications. In conformity with CEDAW, the country, inclusive of all its institutions, is committed to ensure substantive equality and not just formal equality. The former is about truly impacting on the lives of the people and ensuring that there is no discrimination whatsoever amongst its citizens. This is no doubt a big challenge/a tall order because it means acting to transform institutions, organisations, the diverse structures and mechanisms which often contribute to inequality. More importantly, it implies transforming the mindset. Needless to say that this remains an important challenge since human beings are generally very resistant to change.

6. Mission and Vision of the Ministry

The vision of the Ministry is to foster a vibrant local democracy; to promote effective, transparent and proactive delivery of services by Local Authorities; to bridge the development divide between rural and urban areas and to make the Republic of Mauritius a safe place to live, work and visit anytime anywhere, free from the threats of fire and other emergencies.

The Ministry of Local Government, which has under its aegis, the Local Authorities and the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service, aims at:

- (i) empowering the local authorities to be more responsive to the needs of the local community;
- (ii) promoting local democracy while ensuring good governance; and
- (iii) protecting and reducing losses of life and property and preventing damage to the environment due to fire and other threats;

This Ministry is responsible for local government administration coordination generally, with five Municipalities, seven District Councils and 130 Village Councils. Over and above their own revenue-generating activities, central government grants are made available to the local authorities to enable them to provide services and carry out infrastructural developments at regional level. These include the provision of street-lighting, construction and maintenance of roads, drains and public spaces, provision and maintenance of bus shelters and traffic centres, organization of sports and cultural activities, etc.

7. Gender Equality and Local Government

The enactment of the Local Government Act 2011 in December 2011 brought about a significant improvement women's representation in political and economic decision-making processes at the local level.

The new Local Government Act 2011 provides that for any party or group presenting more than two candidates in an electoral ward or village shall ensure that not more than two thirds of the party's or group's candidates are

of the same sex. In addition, the reserve list of candidates presented by parties or groups to the Electoral Supervisory Commission to be used for the filling of vacancies shall not comprise more than two-thirds of persons of the same sex. Furthermore, the list should indicate the order of precedence of each of the candidates, provided that not more than two consecutive candidates on the list shall be of the same sex.

With a view to enabling the enactment of the Local Government Act 2011, particularly with regards to the presentation of candidates of both sexes at a local government election, amendments were also brought to the Constitution to provide for a minimum of candidates for election to local authorities to be of a particular sex, with a view to ensuring adequate representation of each sex on a local authority.

The legislative amendments have brought about a positive change in the gender representation in local authorities.

8. Gender Representation in Local Authorities

Table one shows elected members at the municipal council elections while table 2 shows elected member village council, following the Municipal Councils elections over the period 1991 to 2015 and the Village Councils elections over the period.

Year	Male	Female
1991	119	7

2001	109	7
2005	110	16
2012	57	33
2015	79	41

Table 2 Elected members at the Village Council Elections, 1992, 1997 and 2012.

Year	Male	Female
1992	1378	14
1997	1435	41
2005	1390	139
2012	873	297

As the tables show, women's representation in local government has increased. In the last local government elections of 2015, there were 358 candidates in the 5 municipalities of Mauritius, of which 166 were women. At the village election (2012) level, there were 3867 candidates in 130 villages of which 1174 were women, which is 30.4%.

Over years, there has been an expansion in the female representation in the Local Government, which can be from the fact that more women are now coming forward as candidates. In the last elections, the Local Government has met the target of having one third of the women's representation.

9.0 Gender Representation in the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service

In the endeavor of rendering the Republic of Mauritius free from the dangers of fire and other emergency threats, the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service has included women firefighters in its men power since the year 2012. Five women firefighters were recruited in the year 2012 and seven women firefighters were recruited in the year 2015.

10.0 Facilities provided to promote Gender Equality in the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service

1. Both men and women are recruited on the same requirements set by the Discipline Force.
2. Training of women and men are done together in the same training unit, there is no segregation, this allow for better integration between male and female at the very beginning.
3. Internationally, the term women firefighters does not exist. Both sex are considered as firefighters.
4. The newly built Fire Stations are equipped with female toilet, mess room and dormitory.
5. Women firefighters are detailed to undertake training with regards to fire drill on a regular basis to keep the standards.

11.0 From Politics of Representation to Politics of Transformation

Advocating for greater numbers of women in local government is necessary not only for a politics of representation but rather for a politics of transformation. If more women are in and there is a move towards a minimum critical mass, it will be easier to push for women's issues. Women

at the grassroots are better placed to understand women's needs and can serve as very interesting point of entry for gender responsive budgeting within the local authority. Civil society with a couple of NGOs have been working relentlessly to train women to stand as candidates for the local elections. More women in would contribute to consolidating democracy at the grassroots.

While there is an open mind and a conviction about the need for gender equality, there is very little knowledge about the extent of gender blindness that pervades the ministry.

12.0 Recommendations

- (i) The Ministry will ensure that appropriate tools and equipment are provided to enable women employees to perform their duties effectively;
- (ii) the Ministry will encourage the local authorities to develop and consolidate gender disaggregated data within all spheres of their activities;
- (iii) local authorities and Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service would be encouraged to work out their own gender policy and an implementable Gender Cell Action Plan on gender equality for implementation with the same national objective, but with a more sectoral approach;

- (iv) local authorities will be encouraged to ensure that infrastructural investments and extent of resource allocation for development projects are gender equitable;
- (v) local authorities will be invited to consider, while preparing their budgetary allocations, enlisting the participation of women in their areas and that their priorities are taken into consideration;
- (vi) local authorities will be encouraged to work towards greater capacity building in gender analysis, gender planning and gender budgeting;
- (vii) local authorities will be encouraged to conduct training courses for staff on gender issues, collect data and develop gender assessment tools, reshape gender policies and facilitate contacts among councillors and women in their areas;
- (viii) local authorities will be encouraged to participate through their respective Local Gender Cell, in the Government vision to make the SMEs a strong pillar of the economy by facilitating and encouraging women entrepreneurs to start a business;
- (ix) the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service will be encouraged to promote an environment of Gender equality at all level of supervision through talks, team work and team building activities; and
- (x) the Mauritius Fire and Rescue Service will be encouraged to include a module on Gender Equality and Gender Base activities in the

induction training for new recruits in order to sensitise the concept of Gender Equality at the very beginning.