

Policy, Advocacy, and Programming on the Africa Women's Protocol

Overview of Oxfam GB's support to women's-rights organisations and government stakeholders in Southern Africa



Introduction

This series of programme insights papers highlights some of the work undertaken by Oxfam GB's partners in Southern Africa to popularise and lobby for the ratification, domestication, and implementation of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women (the Africa Women's Protocol).¹

Oxfam GB's mission is to work with others to overcome poverty and suffering. Our interpretation of poverty goes beyond lack of finances to encompass lack of capabilities, powerlessness, and inequality. Our fight to overcome poverty and suffering focuses on the right to a sustainable livelihood, water, education, health, protection and security, a voice in public life, and freedom from discrimination. The promotion of gender equality and women's rights is therefore at the heart of our efforts. The Africa Women's Protocol is a key tool that legitimises the struggle for gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Africa Women's Protocol was adopted on 11 July 2003, at the meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union in Maputo, Mozambique. The Protocol entered into force in November 2005, after the 15th ratification from Benin. The Protocol is a home-grown human-rights instrument that seeks to promote and protect the rights of African women by reinforcing international human-rights standards and adapting them to address context-specific violations of African women's rights.

The Africa Women's Protocol reinforces issues that are contained in earlier instruments and commitments, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform For Action, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (UNDHR).

The Africa Women's Protocol, however, highlights issues that are lacking in prior instruments such as HIV and AIDS, abortion, and trafficking of women. It also addresses customary issues that are peculiar to Africa such as female genital mutilation (FGM), widow inheritance, and property grabbing.

Oxfam GB Southern Africa fully recognises the importance of home-grown tools like the Africa Women's Protocol in empowering local communities and fostering a rights-based approach to the fight against poverty and suffering. In this vein, Oxfam GB has supported various interventions in support of the Protocol as Figure 1 illustrates. The work highlighted in these programme insights papers covers the regional-level and country-specific work at national level in Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia. Oxfam GB has supported a range of stakeholders in the women's movement and government ministries.

The programme insights papers highlight six critical areas;

- Policy, advocacy, and programming on the Africa Women's Protocol: overview of Oxfam GB's work in Southern Africa
- Popularising the Africa Women's Protocol in Zambia, Malawi, and South Africa

- Monitoring the implementation of women's-rights instruments: the case of the Africa Gender Monitor
- Integrating the Africa Women's Protocol in the Zambia National legal and policy framework
- Power analysis of regional bodies for the effective implementation of the Africa Women's Protocol
- Launch of Programme Insights on the Africa Women's Protocol: women's-rights instruments as a tool to mobilise resources for financing gender equality and women's empowerment.

Summary of interventions

Oxfam GB in Southern Africa has supported its partners' efforts to popularise, advocate, and lobby for the ratification, domestication, and implementation of the Africa Women's Protocol. Some of the key strategies are explained below.

Research

Oxfam GB commissioned regional research in Southern Africa to strengthen the popularisation and mobilisation campaign on the African Women's Protocol. The research analyses the Protocol in the light of selected human-rights instruments. It examines the situation of women and the implications of the Protocol in Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia in the thematic areas of governance, violence against women, and health and reproductive rights. The research assesses awareness about the Protocol among policy makers and civil society and highlights threats, challenges, best practices, and lessons. It concludes that although the African Women's Protocol is a potential force for change, supporters of women's rights and gender equality must take deliberate and concerted action to ensure its popularisation, ratification, domestication, and implementation. The report makes a number of general and country-specific recommendations in this respect. The published research will be launched and disseminated in 2008.

Popularisation

Oxfam GB has supported sensitisation activities to popularise the Africa Women's Protocol. These have included seminars, workshops, and public dialogues that were conducted in South Africa, Zambia, Mozambique, and Malawi. They focused on the implications of the Africa Women's Protocol for national contexts focusing on these thematic areas: violence against women, sexual and reproductive health, and rights relating to HIV and AIDS, governance, and culture. In addition, support was provided to the Ministry of Women and Child Development in Malawi to unpack the Protocol and make it more accessible to policy makers and grassroots communities. The ministry printed 5000 copies of the Protocol and distributed them to different stakeholders such as the justice ministry, faith-based leaders, community leaders, NGOs, and various parliamentary committees. The Ministry also held a number of meetings to disseminate the Protocol.

Advocacy and ratification

Oxfam GB supported women's-rights coalitions in Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa, and Malawi in their efforts to advocate for promoting the ratification of the Protocol. It has also supported advocacy activities at national level. For example in Zambia, Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) was nominated by stakeholders who attended the national consultative workshop on the Africa Women's Protocol (Lusaka, 15 September 2005) as the lead organisation of the National Task Force. The role of the Task Force was to lobby for the popularisation and ratification of the Africa Women's Protocol. Organisations that constitute the Task Force are: the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW), WLSA, Women for Change, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) and the Media Institute of Southern Africa.

In Malawi, the 16 days of Activism against violence against women were used as a strategy to remind the president and his government of the various promises that were made to women.

Due to the various efforts of the different partner organisations, the Africa Women's Protocol has now been ratified in the four countries cited above.

Domestication

To help give practical application to the provisions of the Protocol, Oxfam GB supported efforts to integrate them into national legal and policy frameworks. For example:

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development in Malawi used the Protocol to promote speedy legislation of the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act.
- The Malawi government has enhanced various structures necessary for the implementation of issues related to gender-based violence (GBV). Community development assistants and social workers have been recruited and community action groups on GBV have been set up. These are comprised of respected and influential people in the communities, such as marriage counsellors.
- WLSA used the opportunity of the constitutional review process in Zambia to reflect most of the provisions contained in the Africa Women's Protocol, in the draft constitution. The process is not yet finalised. Some of the areas in the Protocol that are highlighted in the draft constitution of Zambia are the right to dignity, marriage, protection of women in education, and training.

Charity begins at home and Oxfam GB is using the provisions in some of its own programmes such as the Zambezia education programme in Mozambique. The programme focuses on girls' education. Provisions on education, HIV and AIDS, and violence against women and girls that are contained in the Africa Women's Protocol are integrated in the various sensitisation activities conducted at grassroots, district, and provincial levels to strengthen efforts aimed at the retention of girls in schools.

Power analysis of key stakeholders at sub-regional and regional levels

Oxfam GB commissioned a power analysis to identify key actors necessary to support efforts aimed at attaining the ratification, domestication, and implementation of the Africa Women's Protocol and the Abuja Declaration on Health (including HIV and AIDS). The power analysis contains a strategic analysis of key targets in the African Union and other regional organisations. It looks at selected organisations with a view to identifying their roles, functions, strengths, and weaknesses in order to recommend ways in which Oxfam GB can support women's-rights organisations and other stakeholders to achieve policy and practice changes.

Networking and capacity-building

In line with its mission of working with others, Oxfam GB identifies, supports, and collaborates with key allies and partners. Figure 2 outlines some of Oxfam GB Southern Africa's key partnerships in its work on the Africa Women's Protocol.

Oxfam GB aims to enhance the institutional capacity of women's-rights organisations to use policy spaces created by regional and international bodies such as the African Union and the United Nations to advance women's rights.

Monitoring the implementation of women's-rights instruments

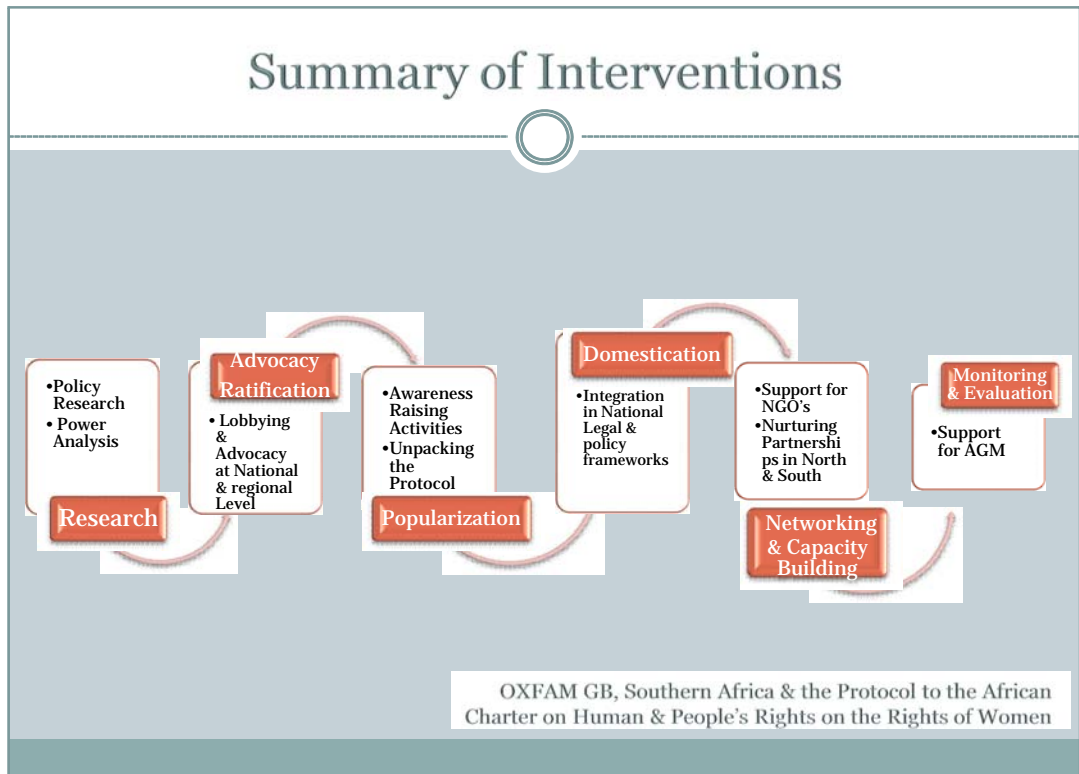
Oxfam GB Southern Africa supported a new initiative – the African Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Monitor (known as the Africa Gender Monitor or AGM) – to conduct research to how selected African governments are faring with regard to the implementation of commitments related to women's rights in various thematic areas.

The purpose of the research was to provide baseline information that will be used as basis for holding governments accountable for the commitments they have made through international and regional instruments on women's human rights.

The study examined the situation of women in Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tunisia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe with a focus on these thematic areas: legal and policy framework, governance and representation including role of women in conflict management and resolution, sexual and reproductive health, GBV, trade and poverty alleviation, and girl-child education. It also looked at national processes for the operationalisation of women's rights, key stakeholders and awareness about women's-rights instruments, as well as best practices.

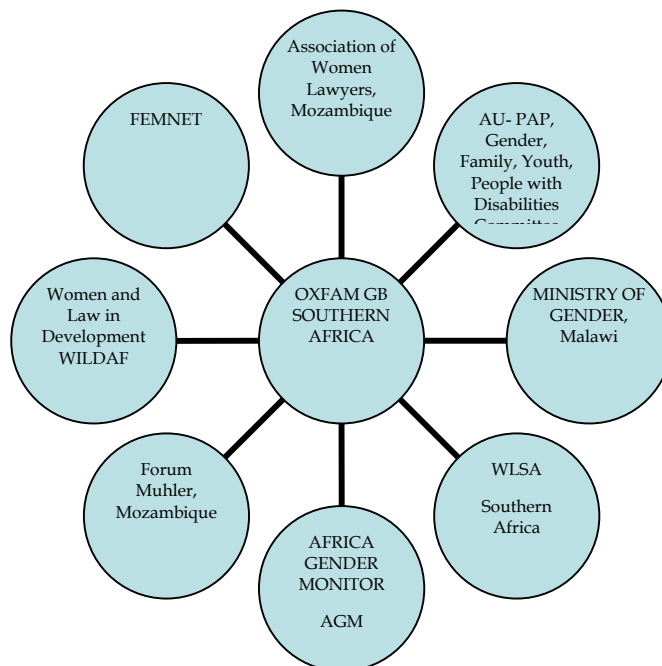
In addition, Oxfam GB supported a continent-wide workshop organised by the AGM as part of the process for assessing governments' accountability on women's human rights. This was attended by a range of national, regional, and international stakeholders from civil-society organisations, academia, and bilateral agencies such as The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and The Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) Gender Unit. A summary of key interventions is highlighted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Summary of interventions



Oxfam GB supports women's-rights organisations at national and regional level in their efforts to popularise and advocate for the domestication and implementation of the Africa Women's Protocol. Figure 2 illustrates the key partnerships.

Figure 2: Key partnerships



Communications events on the Africa Women's Protocol

Oxfam GB supported a visit to the UK and the Netherlands to popularise the Africa Women's Protocol. The visit was undertaken by some of the key stakeholders working on the Africa Women's Protocol. The objectives of the event were to:

- raise awareness about the Africa Women's Protocol;
- share the experiences of Oxfam GB and Oxfam Novib and partners on the Africa Women's Protocol;
- identify key donors/partners and allies in the UK/Netherlands that can support Oxfam to take this work forward; and
- learn from the experience of Oxfam GB, Oxfam Novib, and partners in lobbying and advocacy, and thus enhance capacity to mobilise international support for work on the Protocol.

The delegation comprised of Matriline Bbukku Chuulu, Regional Coordinator, WLSA; Muchimba Sikumba-Dils, the Chairperson of the AGM; Thérèse Niyondiko, Acting Executive Director of the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) in Nairobi Kenya, who represented Solidarity for Africa Women's Rights (SOAWR); and Christobel Chikwana, Deputy Director, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Malawi.

Key outputs

The visit is likely to lead to increased funding and political support for women's-rights organisations working to promote women's rights in Africa. Areas for possible future collaboration include support to partner organisations in:

- institutional capacity-building in the form of resource mobilisation and enhancing partners' skills in lobbying, campaigns, and advocacy;
- building the capacity of organisations to work with western media and to communicate their work creatively through the use of tools such as video clips, audio-visual materials, and interactive websites;
- building capacity to effectively use policy spaces created by regional and international bodies such as the African Union and the United Nations; and
- lobbying for better aid modalities and assistance in mobilising resources.

Implications for Oxfam GB

There is huge potential for Oxfam GB to develop a fully fledged programme on women's rights using the Africa Women's Protocol as an entry point to strengthen the women's movement in Africa. The programme could draw on the above key issues identified as areas for possible future collaboration.

Conclusion

The Africa Women's Protocol legitimises the struggle for gender equality as an African struggle and strengthens the international legal framework for the promotion and protection of women's rights. Despite its imperfections, it is a potential force for positive change. If properly harnessed, it can serve as an effective empowerment tool for African women.

Oxfam GB's work with the Protocol is paying off. Already all the countries where work has been done have ratified the Protocol. In Mozambique Oxfam GB is working on using the provisions of the Protocol in the Zambezia education programme. In Zambia, with the support of Oxfam GB, WLSA is undertaking a programme to help integrate the protocol into the legal and policy framework. The AGM is developing a monitoring framework for the Protocol with Oxfam GB's support. Oxfam GB is forging critical partnerships around its work on the Protocol with organisations such as Novib, Oxfam International, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Netherlands, and the UK's Department for International Development.

All these efforts are steps forward in the struggle to empower African women. Empowering African women, who make up more than half of the continent's population, will have a positive multiplier effect. It will result in happier, healthier, wealthier, and more harmonious families and societies.

Recommendations

The Africa Women's Protocol can be an effective tool for changing the lives of women and men but a lot of work must be done to promote it, unpack it, and domesticate it so as to give it practical relevance in day-to-day life. Efforts should be strengthened to:

- promote continent-wide ratification;
- support institutions and organisations that promote monitoring and implementation of the Protocol;
- ensure the domestication of the protocol through the incorporation of its provision in legal and policy frameworks and setting up or strengthening various measures and mechanisms necessary for the implementation of the provisions contained in the Africa Women's Protocol;
- popularise the Protocol so that women can be equipped to use it to claim their rights; and
- support further research on how the Protocol can be used to enhance the lives of African women and ultimately African societies.

In pursuing these activities it is important that Oxfam GB:

- maximises synergy by identifying and supporting potential partners and by building on what exists;
- strengthens the institutional capacity of women's-rights organisations;

- makes the Protocol relevant at the grassroots level through practical interventions (actions do speak louder than words);
- ‘walks the talk’, by using the Protocol and what it stands for in its own programmes and projects consistently;
- sees it through, by ensuring that activities are undertaken on the whole spectrum of the continuum from ratification and popularisation to domestication and monitoring; and
- keeps the fire burning and avoids being side-tracked by the next global priority or by bouts of analysis paralysis.

Note

¹ Advocacy for the ratification, domestication, and implementation of the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa in Southern Africa is complimented by a wider continental movement of 29 national women's organisations co-ordinated under the Solidarity for African Women's Rights coalition since 2004. For more information see www.fahamu.org.

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