

Women and Girls Programme Strategy 2009-12



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although some gains have been made, there is still much to be done to ensure all the commitments made for women and girls across the world, and particularly Africa, over the last 25 years are achieved. Research by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) in 2006 showed that funding for women's rights had been dramatically decreasing over the last ten years, and that this threatened to undermine the significant gains made since the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) came into force. In 2008 an independent review of the impact of the grants made under the Women and Girls programme between 1999 and 2006 was carried out. Based on the findings of the impact study, Comic Relief has reviewed our stance on women and girls with the intention of building what we have learnt into our new strategy, consolidating the gains we have made over the years and adopting a more strategic approach. The aim of the programme is to contribute to a transformation in the status and lives of women and girls in Africa so that they can realise their rights and their full potential, and become equal and respected members of families, communities and society. We want Comic Relief's funding to address changes at both the practical and structural levels and to bring about positive and enduring changes for women and girls in Africa.

2. WHY WOMEN AND GIRLS?

Background

Although some gains have been made, there is still much to be done to ensure all the commitments made for women and girls across the world, and particularly Africa over the last 25 years, are achieved. 70% of the world's poorest people are women; they own only 1% of the world's property; 55%¹ of those not enrolled in school are girls; 66% of illiterate people are women and nearly 50% of all sexual assaults worldwide are against girls aged 15 years or younger.

Domestic violence is the largest cause of women's injury and death, leading to more deaths and disability among women aged 15-44 than malaria, war, traffic accidents, and cancer. It is estimated that 1 in 3 women in Africa experiences violence in the home. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that female genital mutilation (FGM) has affected as many as 138 million women and girls in Africa, and the numbers continue to rise at a rate of approximately 2 million per year. 27% of girls aged 15-19 in sub-Saharan Africa have been married and 28% have given birth by age 18.

The lack of women's role in decision making in community affairs and local institutions, remains a challenge but is a necessary step towards improving political representation. Women in Africa are generally excluded from decision making in the home, communities and society, and they represent only a 17% share of parliamentary seats across Africa.

¹ 2009 UNESCO Global Monitoring Report

Global Commitments

Millennium Development Goals

In September 2000, UN Member States made a commitment to achieve eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. It is a recognised fact that progress towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women must be made in order to achieve all eight of the Millennium Development Goals, though there are MDGs with specific targets relevant to women and girls in: MDG 1: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, MDG 2: to achieve universal primary education, MDG 3: to promote gender equality and empower women, and MDG 5: maternal mortality.

Other Significant International Instruments

The global responses to the inequalities experienced by women and girls are expressed internationally in a number of commitments, most notably UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which entered into force in 1981, and is often described as an international bill of rights for women. The Convention provides the basis for realising equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to education, health and employment, as well as equal opportunities in political and public life, including the right to vote and to stand for election. The Convention is the only international human rights treaty which affirms the reproductive rights of women and targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations². The 1992 UN Declaration on Violence Against Women is the first international human rights instrument to address the issue.

The 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa is a ground-breaking charter outlining a set of Articles to ensure the rights of women and girls across Africa. In its twenty plus Articles, the Protocol refers to the rights of women and includes specific reference to the right to education and training, economic and social welfare rights, health and reproductive rights, the elimination of harmful practices and rights in marriage, women's rights to the participation in the political and decision making process, access to justice and equal protection before the law, widows rights, the rights of elderly women, and the right to inheritance, among others.

Global Response

The early/mid 2000's saw a precipitous drop in funding for women's organisations. The majority of donors 'mainstreamed'³ gender; gender 'fatigue' set in (particularly in competition with other issues such as HIV); there was an increase in direct government to government funding; and many foundations increased their grant size to a minimum of US\$1m and required programmes to illustrate change quickly, something women's organisations often struggle to do. Many funders are also targeting their funding for work with women into HIV programmes, further reducing the amount of funding available for work on women's specific priorities. Research by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) in 2006 showed that funding for women's rights had been dramatically decreasing over the last ten years, and that this threatened to undermine the significant gains made in women's rights since CEDAW came into force.

There is a growing recognition amongst donors that more funding needs to be allocated to gender equality programming. Funding for gender equality work is accessible from a variety of sectors, with the biggest funders for work being bi- and multi-lateral donors. Large private foundations including the Novo Foundation and the Ford Foundation have long supported women's rights, as well as small grant makers such as, the Global Fund for Women, Mama Cash, HIVOS, the African Women's Development Fund, and the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights. However, many grants are made for one year, with a smaller percentage being made for multi annual work and comprises predominantly project as opposed to core funding⁴.

² United Nations 1997-2007

³ Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. United Nations. "Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997". A/52/3. 18 September 1997

⁴ Association for Women's Rights on Development "Where's the Money for Women's Rights" FundHer Brief 2008

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) is the women's fund at the United Nations. In Africa, UNIFEM focuses on providing support to women's leadership in post-conflict situations and peace negotiations and on transforming policy processes to eliminate women's poverty, violence against women and HIV/AIDS. Networks addressing women's rights and gender equality include the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) which is an international membership organisation committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights.

How does Comic Relief fit in?

Comic Relief is almost unique among UK funders in having a long established dedicated Women and Girls grants programme. The programme grew out of Comic Relief's general Africa grants programme which had as its focus 'the most disadvantaged' – people that often slipped through other donors' nets. It is argued that mainstreaming gender has not often proved to be an effective way of meaningfully reaching women and girls or addressing their particular needs and priorities, hence the need for Comic Relief to have a dedicated programme that focuses on women and girls. Having a women and girls programme allows organisations to submit applications that meet the needs of women and girls in a 'holistic' way.

How the Women and Girls strategy was developed

In 2008 an independent review of the impact the grants made under the Women and Girls programme between 1999 and 2006 was carried out. The aim of the study was to assess what the women and girls programme has achieved through grants. The methodology included a comprehensive survey of a workshop with southern partners, workshops with UK partners, several key informant interviews (southern and northern) and a literature review of a number of key reports from the sector.

This review found that Comic Relief's funding has successfully supported the work of organisations that are tackling highly sensitive issues, and working with some of the most disadvantaged women and girls. Among the main findings of the impact study were that Comic Relief should be more focused about the change we want to achieve with women and girls, increasing the impact of established projects by introducing a funding principle which favours applications where community-level activities connect up to the 'wider women's movement' and decision-making structures at regional or national level. Up to now, Comic Relief has mainly contributed to change through grant-making but we would like to consider the opportunities to engage in other ways, e.g. through advocacy, and using some of its strategic partnerships & expertise in communications and ICT to increase impact.

We have developed our strategy for the next four years based on the findings of the programme review, consultations with NGOs and funders in the North and South, by examining funding trends and gaps, by identifying and prioritising areas of need, and by identifying the areas where we have had a demonstrable track record.

3. WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

Our goal is to contribute to a transformation in the status and lives of women and girls in Africa so that they can realise their rights and full potential, and become equal and respected members of families, communities and society.

How does Comic Relief believe this change can happen?

Comic Relief believes that the lives and status of women and girls can be transformed by:

- Taking a life cycle approach and addressing needs and priorities from girlhood, young adulthood, through to womanhood and old age.
- Understanding and addressing the rights of women and girls.

- Tackling the culture of impunity at the family, community and societal level that results in women and girls being vulnerable to incidences, and the impact of, violence, abuse and harmful traditional practices.
- Supporting women and girls whose lives we seek to change as the best people to drive the work and supporting women and girls to represent their own agendas, including representative organisations.

We want our support to address changes at both the practical and structural levels and to bring about positive and enduring changes. We believe that for work to be successful, it must understand and address gender inequalities by working with both women and girls and men and boys at all levels, and that supporting girls and women to transform their lives will lead to positive changes in the lives of their families and communities, and ultimately, in society, thus breaking the cycle of poverty, exploitation and abuse.

Outcomes

Comic Relief wants to know that the projects we fund are bringing about changes in the lives of poor and disadvantaged people. We call these changes programme level outcomes, and define them as the 'intended or unintended effects or changes to people's lives that happen as a result of the project or organisation's activities'. During the period covered by this strategy, we anticipate that the lives of women and girls will be transformed as follows:

- Improvements in girls' access to, and attainment in basic education and women's access to and attainment in adult literacy, leading to improvements in women and girls confidence, self worth and marketable skills.
- Improvements in women's ownership and management of property and productive assets and the promotion of strategies that advance the economic and social rights of women in the employment sector, so that they have better control over their lives and their prospects.
- An improved customary and civil environment that promotes and enforces women and girls' safety, together with improved support and services available to those at risk of and affected by gender based violence⁵ resulting in increased safety and protection of women and girls.
- Increased representation of, and accountability towards, women and girls in state, customary and civic bodies leading to changes in policies and practices that contribute to improvements in the quality of life of women and girls.

Geographical Focus

The Women and Girls programme will focus on any country or region in Africa.

Target Group

The overall aim is to support women and girls. Within this we expect projects to give priority to:

Girls who are attending or who are not in school and women who've missed out on education. This is because education yields some of the highest returns of all development investments.

Women and girls in the formal and informal employment sector. This is because the jobs they occupy remain unregulated and unstable.

Women and girls at risk of and survivors of domestic and sexual violence, gender based violence including harmful traditional practices. This is because violence prevents women and girls from participating fully in society and is a major obstacle to development, peace and security.

Women and girls with the potential to take on roles of leadership and decision making or who already occupy such positions but could be supported in making an even greater impact. In many countries, measures have been taken to increase the representation of women in all levels of government and decision-making processes but progress has been slow and women are still underrepresented at every

⁵ Priority will be given to work that is addressing harmful traditional practices, sexual and domestic violence.

level of government.

Priority will be given to work with African organisations that are led and managed by women as we believe that supporting women and girls whose lives we seek to change is the best way to ensure that they are better able to represent agendas and implement work to transform their lives and the lives of their families and communities.

Linkages Across Programmes

In order to continue to support the grants that support women workers, Comic Relief will establish a "Trade Links" programme which works across the Trade, Women and Girls and Street and Working Children's programmes. The "Trade Links" programme will focus on learning and research from grants in each of the three programmes about how to improve the lives of workers globally.

4. UNDERSTANDING WHAT WE'VE ACHIEVED AND HOW WE ACHIEVED IT

Understanding what difference we have made

We want to be able to tell the public what difference our funding has made in each grant-making programme, both in terms of individual stories of change and on a more systematic and aggregated basis. We want to be able to say who we have helped, how many have benefited and in what kinds of ways. We want to understand the extent to which our programmes have brought about lasting changes in the lives of those directly benefiting, as well as changes in policy.

We will ask grantees to provide information on progress towards their project outcomes on an annual basis, at the end of the grant period and through external evaluations, using outcomes and indicators that they agree with us at the start of the project.

Understanding how we made a difference

We are also committed to learning from the work that we fund, so we can understand not only what difference we have made, but how changes to people's lives happen. For example we want to test out our assumptions about the key factors that create change for our target groups, and find out which approaches or methodologies work better than others in different contexts. We also want to know which types of local organisations are most effective in supporting change for different groups in a variety of contexts, and how relationships between, and inputs from, partner organisations and other stakeholders, including Comic Relief, help or hinder the delivery of change. Some cross-cutting issues that we are also interested in include education, sport, disability and gender.

Alongside these broad questions above, which we will explore through all the work that we fund, we have developed specific learning questions for each programme to help us gain more in-depth understanding of some of the assumptions underpinning our work in different contexts. For the Women and Girls programme these are:

What evidence is there of the links between community involvement in education, parental literacy, and girl's access and attainment in school?

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are strong links between community involvement in education, parental literacy, and girl's access and attainment in school but there has been little analysis of the success or otherwise of these approaches. We would like our learning to investigate and test out this assumption.

What are the factors that enable women in an African context to end the cycle of violence and abuse in domestic relationships?

Economic dependence is often considered as the main reason for women staying in violent and abusive domestic relationships but are there other factors that influence whether or not women stay in such

relationships?

What are the key factors necessary to support government legislation to bring about the eradication of harmful traditional practices?

Many countries have laws that ban harmful traditional practices (early marriage, FGM, etc) but it is still found to be prevalent in many. What are the key factors necessary to support government legislation in bringing about the eradication of harmful traditional practices.

What added value do organisations that are led and managed by women and girls bring to work addressing the rights, needs and priorities of women and girls?

The women and girls programme makes the rights and needs of women and girls its top priority. It is thus important to understand the role that women leaders and organisations play in creating change that addresses the specific needs and priorities of women and girls.

“Women workers are good for trade but is trade good for women workers”: What are the key factors for ensuring that women workers and producers benefit equitably from trade?

Research by the International Labour Rights Fund suggests that in agricultural industries, women make up a significant proportion of the formally documented workforce, and studies by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) note that when including informal participation in this sector, particularly in developing countries, women may produce over half the world's food. What are the key factors for ensuring that women workers and producers benefit equitably from trade? Building on Comic Relief's support of work in the agricultural sector in South Africa, Zambia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania, we would like understand what the effects of trade liberalisation and the rise of export orientated industries have been on female wage labour?

Learning Activities

We want to take every opportunity to collect the evidence needed to address these learning questions. We expect most Comic Relief grantees to address some of these learning questions in their work. Annual reports

will ask for any evidence grantees may have collected over the year in relation to any of the learning questions, either through systematic research or more anecdotal reflection by staff. We also expect externally commissioned evaluations to address any learning questions relevant to the project. Comic Relief visits to projects, and discussions with staff and those benefiting from the project will also provide important insights into the issues raised by the learning questions. Projects can include funding for action research in relation to one or more learning questions above, either at application stage, or through top-up funding over the life of the grant. We may also commission independent research, including literature reviews to get an overview of existing evidence. We plan to establish communities of practice with a focus on the role of men and boys in work addressing the rights of women and girls, sustainable volunteerism, and linking local level work to the wider policy context. In addition, we would like to better understand the linkages between incidences of harmful traditional practices among the Diaspora/BME community in Africa and the UK. This will include joint work with UK Grants and support advocacy and policy work in Africa and the UK. Finally we will support research on issues including the role and added value of women led organisations in bringing about change in the lives of poor women and girls.

We will share what we learn through dedicated reports, ongoing learning meetings both in the UK and overseas with grantees and other donors, and online learning environments. Above all we are committed to applying what we learn, in order to help our grantees deliver change more effectively; to improve our policies and processes, and our performance as a grant-maker; and to support our advocacy and public education work.