

P O L I C Y B R I E F

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National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality: Implications for Redesign, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Auditing

Executive Summary

South Africa is among the countries that have gender equality as a specific clause in the Bill of Rights enshrined in the Constitution (1996). The constitutional imperative and intent for gender transformation are outlined in the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (NPF_WEGE), initiated in 2000. Despite the slow pace of gender transformation, various milestones have been achieved because of the framework. Among these is the inclusion of gender in the National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) (2019) and the implementation of the GenderResponsive Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Auditing Framework (GRPBMEAF) (2019). Other achievements include the inclusion of gender targets in the 2019-2024 Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and in the revised sectoral Framework for Strategic Plans and Annual Performance Plans (APPs). The increasing gendered reporting to inform policy and programming on the empowerment of girls and women is due to the implementation of the National Gender Framework. Among key milestones attributable to the framework is the 25-year review on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (DWYPD, 2019). The objective of this policy brief is to assess the ef-

fectiveness of NPF-WEGE in influencing sectoral policies to achieve women's empowerment in South Africa.

The analysis suggests that various challenges have constrained the effectiveness of the NPF_WEGE. These constraints include the failure of departments to mainstream gender in their policies and programmes. Furthermore, the failure of various departments to implement and institutionalise gender-responsive planning, budgeting, monitoring, evaluation, and auditing has resulted in gender-blind interventions and constrained women's empowerment and gender equality.

This policy brief recommends the following:

1. The NPF_WEGE (2000) needs to be reviewed and updated to align with local and global policy developments for women's empowerment and gender equality.
2. Indicators for women's empowerment and gender equality that are missing from the original NPF-WEGE need to be integrated into its redesign or a new framework or policy for WEGE.
3. There is a need to include a monitoring and evaluation framework for the new or revised WEGE framework and policy.



Introduction

When the National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (NPF_WEGE) was initially designed, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had just been launched and these included women's empowerment and gender equality goals. Subsequently, global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the period 2015-2030, as well as continental development targets such as Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), have all, to varying degrees, aimed to address women's empowerment in Africa. The government committed itself to international norms and conventions that advance women's empowerment and gender equality. South Africa's commitment to achieving women's empowerment and gender equality is shown by the treaties and conventions within the African Union (AU), Southern African Development Co-operation (SADC) and the United Nations (UN). By 2019, South Africa had approved 27 out of 189 International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions that related to advancing women's empowerment and gender equality (DPME, 2019). During the same period, 24 out of the 27 approved conventions were already enacted. The ratification of 27 out of 189 conventions within a period of 25 years seems like slow progress. There is need for further investigation to explore the conventions that have not yet been consented to and the rationale that underlies the cautious approach on the part of government. In 2008, South Africa endorsed the Gender Declaration and Protocol by Heads of State of Government of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (AfDB, 2009). These global and continental frameworks have been integrated into the local initiatives aimed at achieving women's empowerment and gender equality. The objective of this brief is to critically assess the effectiveness of NPF_WEGE in influencing sectoral policies and programmes to ensure their responsiveness to gender considerations and to identify focal areas that need to be

included into the new women's empowerment and gender equality policy.

NPF-WEGE Institutional Framework

The institutional framework for monitoring and improving the status of women is embedded in the National Gender Machinery (NGM), which was established to "act as a vehicle through which South Africa can meet its constitutional and international commitments to gender equality, human rights and social justice" (OSW, 2000: 25-26). The NGM "refers to a set of coordinated structures within and outside government which aim to achieve equality for women in all spheres of life: political, civil, social, economic, and cultural" (OSW, 2000: 26). The National Gender Machinery (NGM) should comprise of structures at different levels of the state and civil society. These structures include the Department of Women, Youth, and People with Disabilities (DWYPD), National Gender Focal Points, and Provincial Gender Focal Points. In addition, the NGM comprises of statutory institutions such as the Commission for Gender Equality, the Human Rights Commission (HRC), the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the Public Protector; the Joint Monitoring Committee and civil society (DWYPD, 2000). The Commission for Gender Equality was established through an Act of Parliament (Act 39 of 1996). The CGE Act outlines the powers and functions of the Commission, including the monitoring and evaluation of policies and practices of the 'organs of state at any level; statutory bodies or functionaries; bodies and authorities; and private businesses, enterprises, and institutions to promote gender equality and make any recommendations that the Commission deems necessary. The CGE (1996), as the agency responsible for monitoring the pace of gender transformation, has been in existence for much longer than other institutions dealing with gender equality. However, it has been critiqued for weaknesses such as "favouring public information and edu-

cation over... acting as a watchdog of the government and legislative performance on gender equality goals" (AfDB, 2009: iv). The CGE has also been critiqued for not being independent enough to take up issues associated with the government. The communications strategy of the CGE and its relationship with NGOs were identified as area requiring improvement (AfDB, 2009). The national gender machinery forms the basis upon which the NPF_WEGE was designed and outlined the principles upon which women's empowerment and gender equality would be achieved. The WEGE framework provided guidelines for national gender mainstreaming across all "structures, institutions, policies, procedures, practices and programmes of government, its agencies, and parastatals, civil society, and the private sector" (OSW, 2000: ii). The review of the NPF_WEGE suggests that the document identified key indicators critical to South Africa attaining women's empowerment and gender equality (gender relations, poverty, globalisation, HIV/AIDS, violence, access to basic needs, access to basic resources, land, science and technology, political power and employment, economic empowerment of women, implementation of laws, and the national gender machinery). The NPF_WEGE (2000) is underlain by principles derived from the Constitution, including the equality of all persons, non-sexism, and non-racism, recognition of women rights as human rights, subjection of customary and religious rights to equality, implementation of affirmative action, pro-

motion of women's economic empowerment, an efficient NGM, provision of training to improve the knowledge, skills and gender equality to policy-makers, and collaboration between the NGM and various portfolio committees. Efforts to implement the NPF_WEGE have been inconsistent and varied across departments.

A significant limitation of the NPF_WEGE framework is that since 2000, it has not been reviewed to identify its existing gaps and align it with the current national context (social, economic, political technological and legal). Since the promulgation of the National Policy Framework on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, the DWYPD has not conducted a review of the gender framework to unravel its gaps and limitations. The implementation of the National Policy framework (NPF) has been impacted by the changes in leadership, the selection of issues for prioritisation and changes in the global and local development priorities. After the 2009 elections, the ANC under President Zuma re-organised government priorities into 12 outcomes. These twelve national development priorities were also articulated in the National Development Plan (Vision 2030) (DPME, 2012) and designated as 12 government priorities in 2010 known, as outcomes. Despite the existence of the NPF_WEGE, only a few of the national priorities were gendered, and as a result, policies, programmes, processes, and procedures could not be monitored, evaluated, and audited for gender responsiveness.



Challenges and Constraints

The indicators for women's empowerment identified in NPF_WEGE were not exhaustive. Although global debates on climate change, energy efficiency, racism and xenophobia were part of the discourse, when NPF_WEGE was designed, these found little or no expression in the document. Over the years, the gaps in NPF_WEGE have been identified and developed into local programmes and strategies for intervention by the government and various stakeholders. Climate change, gender-based violence, xenophobic violence, racism, and the lack of gender mainstreaming across government departments, development goals, medium-term strategies and annual performance plans have also been taken up as challenges to be addressed. Racism and xenophobia are persistent, and their gendered dimensions illustrate the complexity of these challenges. Recent bills aimed at addressing gender inequality include the Cyber Crimes Act (19 of 2020), the Bill on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, Climate Change (B9-2022), and the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) (2020), which seeks to combat violence and murders against women and girls. These bills and programmes advance women's empowerment and gender equality. Alongside the bills, various frameworks, such as the Gender Responsive Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring, Evaluation and Auditing Framework, have been introduced. Recent bills, programmes, strategies, and frameworks point to interventions put in place to address the existing gaps that constrain the achievement of

women's empowerment and gender equality in South Africa. The interventions represent government attempts to comply with the guiding principles of NPF_WEGE. Various instruments have been adopted by the government and DWYPD, specifically, to achieve women's empowerment. These include gender responsive planning, budgeting, monitoring, evaluation, and auditing (GRPBMEA). The varied adoption of women's empowerment interventions by government departments and the lack of uniform institutionalisation of empowerment instruments such as GRPBMEA have resulted in slow achievement of local and global goals on gender equality (DWYPD, 2023). The varied implementation of the GRPBMEA framework by government departments and different spheres of government points to implementation and institutionalisation challenges, rather than the complete lack of interventions for women's empowerment.

The 25-year review on women's empowerment noted that although sex-disaggregated data exists across different sources, various departments do not possess such information due to the lack of compliance. There is a dearth of gender mainstreaming in the planning and reporting systems of various departments and public programmes (DWYPD, 2023). There is a lack of alignment and coherence among different actors, stemming from a lack of common understanding of what women's empowerment and gender equality entails in practical terms, such as budgeting, programming, monitoring, evaluation, and auditing.



Local and Global Trends Relevant to WEGE

The social, economic, and technological advances, both globally and locally, have exposed weaknesses in the NPF_WEGE framework. In 2000, climate change was already affecting communities, and the omission climate justice from the NPF_WEGE (2000) represents a challenge in prioritising livelihoods for both urban and rural women. Since 2000, the Climate Change Bill (B9-2022) only mentions women twice. The failure to mainstream climate change and climate justice across all policies and programmes results in policy incoherence. In the same vein, a gender-neutral climate change bill, which only mentions women twice, results in the marginalisation of women in issues that affect their livelihoods. For policy coherence, the Climate Change Bill needs to be gender responsive. In 2000, Information Communications Technology (ICT) had already penetrated the country through the use of cell phones and computers. However, the pervasiveness of social media in 2000 was not as extensive as it has become in 2023. The proliferation of ICTs, satellite television, social media, and virtual communication have gendered consequences and implications. The utilisation social media has profoundly impacted business and social life. Techno savvy youth have raked in the millions and billions just mastering the business dimension of by social media. Media influencers, through garnering followers have raked in millions through their popularity. In the same vein, millions of youths without internet connectivity have missed out on the digital revolution. Although some municipalities and metros have intervened to avail free Wi-Fi, millions of youths and women have not been able to tap into the power of the digital revolution to transform their lives and those of their communities. Business and social life are now conducted not physically but virtually. The shift to online transactions and interactions have also given rise to virtual bullying, harassment, and femicide (Olweus & Limber, 2018; Slonje et al, 2013; Notar et al, 2013). On January 28, 2022, President Cyril Ramaphosa signed three new GBV laws aimed at strengthening efforts to end gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa. These gender concerns are now included in the Cybercrimes Act and the National Strategic Plan on Gender based Violence and Femicide (2020), and represent the elements that need to be updated in the reviewed WEGE Framework.

Environmental issues, such as climate change, were already global and local development problems when the NPF_WEGE was drafted. However, the concerns were excluded from the document (DWYPD, 2000). The report on gender priorities for South Africa (2019-2024) identified concerns such as the digital revolution, social and climate justice, gender, environment and climate change, intergenerational issues, and concerns such as sexual harassment,

gender-based violence, gender-responsive healthcare services, equal participation of women in political life and decision-making in all areas of life. The rights of the LGBTQIA community were also foregrounded in the gender priorities (2019-2024) (DWYPD). The concerns in the MTSF (2019-2024) remain valid. These, along with additional issues articulated by women and men in grassroots communities, their political representatives, NGOs, and CBOs constitute the gaps in the original NPF_WEGE (2000). The gaps identified in the NPF-WEGE (2000) have over the years been prioritised in programmes and implementation strategies of specific departments. Issues related to information and communications have become complex and multi-dimensional. The complexity not only needs to be recognised but also articulated in ways that address women's empowerment and gender equality.

The NPF_WEGE is the anchor document that articulates the country's institutional and legislative framework for achieving gender equality. The indicators necessary for monitoring gender transformation remain relevant and appropriate, the key indicators that have been addressed in implementation plans and strategies. The indicators need to be included as an integral part and priority in WEGE. The priorities on women's empowerment identified by the government and stakeholders are critical to achieving women's empowerment and gender equality in South Africa.

This policy brief recommends:

1. The priorities identified by grassroots communities, CBOs, NGOs, and government through various frameworks need to be integrated into a consolidated policy framework.
2. The notion of women's empowerment needs to be retained in the frameworks developed, as it speaks to the lived realities and communities of marginalized women in the remotest areas of South Africa.
3. The DWYPD needs to deconstruct the concept of gender so that it does not seem like a weapon for the exclusion of poor women in rural areas, informal settlements, and urban townships.

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