

Mapping Best Practices:

Promoting Gender Equality

and the advancement of

Kenyan Women

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the resilience of Kenyan women, pacesetters of the region in the promotion of gender equality and the advancement of women.

Foreword

What are best practices in the complex process of promoting gender equality and the advancement of women envisioned in key human rights instruments, or in significant intergovernmental agreements like the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action? The reality of women's lives in Kenya, as in other parts of the world, along the 12 critical areas of concern show why women say they "do not need any more words from governments, they want action, they want resources and they want governments to protect and advance women's rights." A key strategy towards transforming the structural arrangements that inhibit women from participating in and contributing to national development on an equal basis with men is women's organizing. Thus women's organizations have taken various forms of collective action towards the important and urgent work of transforming the world into a place where women and men can be treated as full human beings, where women's voices can be heard and where the society can realize the full vision of gender equity, equality and women's empowerment in all spheres of life, private and public.

This publication explores some of the efforts by 14 organizations to enhance the goals of gender equality and women's empowerment with reference to the Beijing Platform for Action. On the basis of best practices, self-selected by the organizations, the author(s) share how the organizations have strategized acted and managed the challenges that come with every gain. The publication indicates that the greatest impact is recorded when individual women, the organized women's movement and government officials lobbying policy makers and decision makers work together. It is when the women who come together clearly define their common goal (perceived area of collective oppression) and chart the path for their collective action that a vibrant, cohesive and successful organizing occurs. Thus the publication underscores the need for "women's organizations to develop management frameworks that are able to respond to both external and more particularly international conflicts with ease."

It is therefore an important documentation of the complex reality that underlies efforts to promote gender equality in Kenya by women's organizations and like-minded organizations. It further provides an opportunity for broad reflection on the state of the advancement of women and gender equality while taking note of the achievements, opportunities and challenges. However the various levels

of 'voice' and 'accountability' that characterize gender equality work call for a more active, calculated and conscientious analysis of the engagement between different interest groups and categories of women in the women's movement than is possible given the present publications scope and focus.

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Preface

A series of global conferences have over the past several decades drawn attention to the economic, social, political and cultural issues that face women. A variety of action plans and international agreements have emerged from these conferences with the result that women in their organizations, institutions and networks have subsequently charted new directions and interventions to propel their societies towards transformations to the cause of women. Among the key international conferences has been the 1985 Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, culminating in the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (NLFs) that called for equality, peace and development as guiding limelight for women's organizing. But more renowned, and building on the spirit of Nairobi was the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, where governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector met, forged and agreed on what came to be known as the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). The platform for Action has comprehensive actions on *12 Critical Areas of Concern* for women's advancement and empowerment. The Platform envisions these 12 areas as guiding principles underlying national and international policies and programmes in a continuing effort to promote equality, development and peace for and with all women.

In Kenya, the NGO sector has been very instrumental in pushing forth the women's agenda and undertaking activities aimed at ensuring the implementation of various international standards and obligations. Their activities have ranged from working directly with communities, sub-national initiatives and national initiatives involving policy influence. All these activities have had certain characteristics and features that define thinking and practice.

One of the primary motivations beyond the Heinrich Boll Foundations engagement in this region in seeking to achieve the overarching goal of gender equality and the advancement of the rights of women has been through the seizing of opportunities to reflect and document on women's groups, working with governments, NGOs and other actors in the civil society, in providing impetus for change. Hence, it has engaged in mapping the best practices in the women's movement since the NLFs, right through to the Beijing processes - and though not exhaustive in its analysis, samples the key practices and areas of concern by select organizations as brought out by the output of both conferences. The 14 organizations selected for the study have passed the criteria of working with the

grass roots at a national level and though other organizations that do not do this have their place, it is those that touch and grow from the ground up like trees, that can cause phenomenal change.

This publication emerges at a crucial time, coinciding with the recently concluded ten-year review of the progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, the five-year review of progress on the Millennium Declaration, and the anniversary of the Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Its conceptualization draws on the experiences and expertise of state officials, members of national civil society, international organizations working on gender issues and the private sector, who participated in various sponsored consultative sessions reflecting on the 1985 Nairobi Conference, the 1995 Beijing Conference and subsequent +5 and +10 reviews. These efforts were further supplemented by varied and intense public discourse in the Foundation's monthly Gender Forum series that assessed the emergent state policy prescriptions and their fit to the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) 12 critical areas of concern providing both materials for human rights education and a guideline for claiming and fulfilling the human rights of women. It is anticipated, that the study's outputs will similarly contribute to the planned commemoration of the Nairobi Conference slated for July 2006.

In these pages, readers will find an assessment of select best practices of choice non-governmental organizations that have national reach in their implementation of international and national obligations. These practices identify what is already being done, where and by whom, with a keen emphasis on what are the striking lessons that can be identified as contributing greatly to the success of gender work.

This book is designed to firstly aid in the mapping out of a logic of what works and why and what the way forward could be, but also forecasts to share information, knowledge and experience for those currently in, or planning to undertake similar work – in bid to provide a framework for building on existing initiatives for greater impact.

Finally, the Beijing Platform for Action-the first truly comprehensive action plan on the 12 areas of critical concern to women's advancement-has become the focus for flagship programmes in several UN agencies in partnership with international community and civil society.

There is no going back on the Platform for Action to enhance the social, economic and political empowerment of women: to improve women's health; to advance their education and training; to promote their marital and sexual rights; and to combat gender based violence. Until these rights of women, as guaranteed in a number of international conventions, and in Africa's own charter on human and people's rights, women's fundamental rights, are fully observed, human rights will not be achieved.

Ultimately, in this struggle as in so many others, the responsibility for change still rests on African women's shoulders. It can no longer come as a surprise to anyone including the men in Africa that gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance. The Beijing Platform for Action called for all these and more. It is time for serious reflection upon and for national action on all these suggestions. It is time to target and change those legal barriers that have constrained women's progress. It is time to change attitudes, to recognize the benefits that will accrue from bringing into the mainstream of policy and the participation of women whose potential has been largely untapped. It is in this light that we did this study of mapping the best practices in promoting gender equality and the advancement of Kenyan women to highlight the contribution of women's organizations dedicated to the BPFA.

Last but not least, the achievements of the best practices would not have been met without the support of various international cooperation partners, as stated and expressed by the 14 women's organizations assessed in this study. These include UNFPA, USAID, ACCORD, CIDA – GESP who facilitated their time and efforts in meeting with the researchers and forging perspectives and reflections of their work in relation to local partner organizations. Unfortunately, we couldn't include this part in this study, though it was very much intended. The reason was the vastness of the matter, which needed a study by itself. We hope this will be a follow-up study by like minded organizations in the future.

It is heartening to realize that this book is a manifestation of multi-directional input, reflecting the combined efforts of a number of individuals and organizations. The Heinrich Boll Foundation would like to acknowledge the contribution and tremendous response of civil society organizations who participated in the study. First and foremost, thanks go to all the Non-governmental Organizations who

shared their stories and examples of interventions towards nurturing an environment for gender equality and social justice. We are grateful to them all for taking the time to respond to requests for information, case-study material and discussion. These organizations included:

African Women and Child Feature Service; Centre for Rights Education and Awareness; Coalition on Violence Against Women; Coalition for Peace in Africa; Family Planning Association of Kenya; Federation of Women Lawyers: FIDA-Kenya; Forum of African Women Educationalists- Kenya Chapter; Green Belt Movement; Kenya Human Rights Commission; Kenya Women's Finance Trust; League of Kenya Women Voters; Maendeleo ya Wanawake; National Council of Women of Kenya and Young Women's Leadership Institute.

Special gratitude goes to Professor Wangari Mathaai, Nobel Peace Prize Winner, 2005 for generously giving her time to meet and provide astute thoughts and stimulating discussion.

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Aseghedech Ghirmazion

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