



Urban Agenda Platform

*The global platform for sharing progress, action and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable urban development.*

# Women empowerment in harsh climatic and social-cultural environment

Partner	Action Aid Kenya
Region	Sub-Saharan Africa
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

## Summary

Womankind Kenya is a non-governmental, nonprofit making and philanthropic organization based in Garissa with field offices in Ijara and Wajir south. Its main objectives include: empowerment of women and the girl child through civic education, emergency intervention and boosting income levels of community through income generation activities and programs.

## Background and Objective

**Situation Before the Initiative Began:** Before the project was initiated there were high illiteracy rates in the community. The residents were deeply entrenched in retrogressive cultural practices particularly FGM and women were highly subdued and disregarded in the community. Poverty levels among this community have further been exacerbated by global warming which has deprived their livestock of water and pasture. There was a prevalence of water borne diseases due to poor sanitation and limited access to water. **Establishment of Priorities:** The priorities of the organization include the following: •Access to education, •Improvement of food security, •Foster good governance nationally and locally, •Improvement of health, water and sanitation, •Empowerment and protection of women through advocacy for women rights. The priorities were developed in consultation with the community and the strategic plan was developed in a participatory manner that involved government institutions, religious leaders and community elders who consisted of both men and women. **Formulation of Objectives And Strategies:** The main objectives of the organization were empowerment of women and the girl child through civic education, emergency intervention and income generating activities and programs; capacity building and imparting skills through education and training; poverty reduction and food security through diversification of economic activities from overreliance on pastoralism to crop production; use of available natural and human resources to sustain the environment and improve livelihoods; to champion governance issues at national and local level and to promote advocacy and policy formulation with regard to vulnerable and marginalized as well as to mitigate retrogressive cultural practices such as FGM. Among the strategies used to implement the program include: consultation with government institutions, religious leaders and community elders as well as women; and identification of community needs through conducting baseline surveys. **Mobilisation of Resources:** Financial resources are mobilized by fund raising through proposal writing and responding to calls for proposals. Finances are also acquired through referral by other partners and donors and participation in fundraising events within and outside the country. On the technical, aspect the organization relies on volunteerism after which competent volunteers are absorbed into the organization. Technical personnel are recruited through competitive advertisement both locally and nationally through the local media. The organization also benefits from technical input from line ministries of governments that are represented locally through close collaboration. The management is responsible for the prudent management of resources through the finance department that has qualified accountants. For accountability purpose funds from each donor is accorded a separate account. The organization reports on its expenditure regularly by each donor, and the donors also conduct their own audits. For transparency the organization holds round table meetings with all donors at the same time to avoid duplication of efforts. Womankind has also established internal and external auditing systems for accountability systems.

## Actions and Implementation

Womankind Kenya being one among the few established NGOs that advocates for women and girls' rights in the area operates on a tight budget which is tied to demands from donor agencies both locally and internationally. The reliance on well wishers and international NGOs from the Islamic world in support of Womankind was slowed down by the 'War on Terrorism' resulting to inadequate financial resources; poor infrastructure and lack of pastoral friendly policies hinder penetration of the program from having a wider coverage; high illiteracy rates that hinder effective communication between the community and other institutions; deeply entrenched inhibitive aspects of the local culture such as FGM that slow down development; and harsh climate and prolonged drought cycles which are worsened by the recent global warming and climate change phenomenon. Some of the activities of the project include establishment of farms along Tana river( a river flowing through Garissa) for production of maize, tomatoes, water melon and bananas through construction of canals for irrigation. These have contributed in enhancing food security and income generation for the locals. The organization has



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established a rescue centre for destitute girls and offers support and education to these children. The centre provides refuge and protection to girls targeted for female genital mutilation. The program has also introduced afforestation programs to the community. The activities are undertaken by the organization together with the target communities. Financial and other challenges have been overcome through fund raising to acquire funds; sensitization, awareness creation and advocacy on the rights of women and community; capacity building through access to education for the girl child and training on skill impartation, water resource management, food security, environmental protection and conservation and income generating activities among others; participation and lobbying national government and policies to mainstream and support gender issues and marginalized groups; and being on the frontline in the contribution and implementation of the Kenya constitution 2010 and particularly on matters of devolution. The initiative was implemented through participation of different organizations and institutions in consultation with the community. For instance the organization's strategic plan was developed in a participatory manner that involved government institutions, religious leaders and community elders who consisted of both men and women. The strategic plan was formulated in line within the objectives of the project based on priority needs identified by the community. The organization is able to monitor its performance through sample surveys that are conducted before the activities commence. Progress is assessed through a monthly and quarterly reporting system that is done within the organization, to the government, donors and to the communities through public fora. The organization has developed work plans that are shared with donors and a budget is also shared with all stakeholders.

## Outcomes and Impacts

Womankind being a philanthropic organization relies heavily on proposal writing to acquire donor funds. However, with introduction of farms the locals have been able to attain food security and income from surplus of the farm products. In addition, the womankind established income generating activities for women groups and constructed a hotel with lodging facilities as an income generating project for the Ballah women's group in Masalani Division of Ijara District. It has also provided beehives for women and youth groups. Due to capacity building and skills impartation over 500 locals have graduated from the tailoring school and either established businesses or gotten employed within Garissa district. Currently, womankind has begun working on a long term business plan to ensure financial sustainability. The plan is being discussed with potential donors to fund raise for initial capital to be used for investments such as real estate, which would raise substantial amounts of revenue to sustain the program. Cultural sustainability has been attained to some level with the community changing its attitude towards women and girls who were previously disregarded and marginalized. Environmental sustainability has also been pursued through awareness creation on the protection and conservation of the environment and introduction of afforestation programs. Institutionally, Womankind has greatly influenced the country's constitution making and the putting in place of the bill on FGM. The organization is managed through efficient transparent and accountable systems as it operates through a board of directors in partnership with various stakeholders who have clear roles and responsibilities.

## Gender and Social Inclusivity

In 2009, Wajir South Development Authority visited Womankind to learn from the initiative with an aim of replicating the same to its farmers. In 2006, women empowerment programme was replicated in Wajir. In 2010 a group from Mt. Elgon who had the same problems of FGM and livelihoods visited Womankind to learn from them. Womankind learnt from action aid in 2008, on establishment of school clubs and girl child education which focuses on reproductive health, motivational talks and self-esteem which worked well for the girls in Garissa. Womankind also learnt from Save our Souls, (SOS) Children's home in Nairobi on issues of social integration whereby the destitute children are grouped into family units headed by a 'mother' so as reflect the natural family set up. Womankind also undertakes exchange programs. For instance, women from Garissa toured Mombasa so as interact and to learn from an empowered women group called Haki za Wanawake (the Rights of Women).

## Innovative Initiative

Womankind has learnt that overreliance on donor funding is detrimental to sustainability and progress of an organization which prompted the organization to develop a business plan for self sustenance. Womankind also learnt that dependence on donor funding inhibits creativity and innovation because these funds are disbursed with conditionalities that are rigid. The other lesson learnt is that involvement of local communities and stakeholders is very critical in the success of any project. Organizations should always ensure participatory planning and networking with other stakeholders. Womankind has also learnt that it is important to respect the traditional knowledge, skills and experiences of the locals. With intensive sanitation, education and capacity building and empowerment of communities, it possible to eliminate stigma and discrimination of marginalized groups. Partnerships, co-ordination and integration between various actors and organization is very important in that it helps actors to save on resources through use of existing infrastructure, provides complementarity and results in a bigger impact. Womankind also learnt from Save our Souls, (SOS) Children's home in Nairobi on issues of social integration whereby the destitute children are grouped into family units headed by a 'mother' so as reflect the natural family set up.

## Conclusion



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This practice has been supported by national policies and legislation as follows: - Womankind was on the frontline in advocating and lobbying the Kenya government on devolution matters during the drafting of the constitution. Womankind was also involved in advising the government to allocate more resources and attention to the marginalized areas. Womankind has also been in the frontline of advocating for a law to protect vulnerable girls from retrogressive cultural practices. These efforts have borne fruit and currently a draft bill on FGM has been drafted. In addition there have been notable changes in people's attitudes and behavior in respect to women and men and their respective roles locally and nationally. References: Daily Nation Newspaper (B. Muriuri, Feature, March 15 2008, Page 16-17) The Star Newspaper (Hafsa, Women Crack Age-old Taboos, November 20 2009, Page 25