

# Changing attitudes in Tanzania



**Raising Her Voice in Tanzania has helped to raise awareness of the African Women's Rights Protocol, and in doing so, has created a shift in attitudes among government ministers, the media and the public, paving the way for effective implementation and coordinated lobbying against female genital mutilation (FGM).**



## Background

Tanzania remains one of the poorest countries in the world, and women fare much worse than men on most measures of poverty. Sixty per cent of women live in absolute poverty; maternal mortality rates remain persistently high; women are almost twice as likely as men to have had no education; and FGM is widespread. Domestic violence is common, but is rarely prosecuted. Tanzania has signed and ratified the African Women's Rights Protocol, an important step in embracing women's rights. However, to be a binding document, the Protocol must go through a process of domestication in Parliament. And for the Protocol to make a real difference in women's lives, it must be understood and put into practice by community leaders and members; law-makers and law-enforcing agencies; civil society organisations working with communities; and by women themselves.

## Objectives

The overall aim of Raising Her Voice in Tanzania is to popularise the Protocol and advocate for its domestication and implementation. Oxfam's main partner in the project is the Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC). Specific objectives are:

- To achieve full domestication of the Protocol by 2013.
- To assess national laws, public policies, and institutions for compliance with the Protocol, leading to legal and administrative reform and more responsive governance.
- To build and support state and non-state alliances to ensure sustained realisation of women's rights and women's inclusion in governance.
- To achieve greater public awareness and support for realising rights contained in the Protocol.
- To produce public information materials in local languages and widely disseminate these in project locations.

## Achievements

### Change in attitudes among policy-makers

Raising Her Voice has brought about an important shift in perceptions of the Protocol in the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children (MOCDGC) which has now publicly committed to support the Protocol. This is a vital development, as the process of domestication will begin with the MOCDGC drafting government policy. The Ministry's original attitude reflects a widespread ignorance about the Protocol, and a tendency to focus on clauses that challenge individuals' religious beliefs, for example, on legalising abortion. The project has attempted to address this by building relationships with personnel at the Ministry, and increasing their understanding through awareness-raising workshops and information sharing. The Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs has also made a public commitment to amend all national laws which are oppressive to women, for example, the Sexual Offences Special Provision Act (SOSPA), which only prohibits the practice of female genital mutilation on girls under the age of 15.

## More women speaking out

The project's work to popularise the Protocol may have contributed to a recent increase in the number of women starting to speak out against gender-based violence and discrimination. Activities have included:

- Training 350 paralegal workers to organise further training sessions with 1,000 community leaders, who then cascaded the information to thousands of others in their communities.
- Producing and participating in television and radio programmes highlighting the benefits of the Protocol, including dial-in radio shows to answer women's queries on their rights, and a documentary aired several times on the national television channel. LHRC estimate that around three million men and women have been reached through their media work.
- Translating the Protocol into Swahili, and also publishing a simplified version, to make it more accessible to a greater number of people.
- Folk and cultural performances, including a Swahili song and traditional dances, to depict issues raised in the Protocol and engage audiences in reflection and debate.

## More women seeking legal aid

LHRC uses a system of 'human rights monitors' at community level who sensitise other community members on human rights issues. The presence of these monitors, along with the training provided to paralegals, has led to an increasing number of people, especially women, seeking legal aid. LHRC centres have reported a 30 per cent increase in the number of women seeking its support.

## Increasingly positive media coverage of the Protocol

Workshops with journalists and editors, and follow-up collaboration with the media to prepare specific programmes and features, has resulted in increased coverage and reference to the Protocol. There is also a shift away from earlier, mostly negative, reporting of the Protocol (referring to the clause on legalising abortion) towards more general, positive coverage in programmes about human rights and women's rights. The Protocol is now also being referred to in interviews and articles on other issues, an important sign that it is becoming more mainstream. This take-up of the issue by the media has been instrumental in creating public awareness.

## Lessons

- Investing time in building relationships with key government officials has proved worthwhile. It has resulted in effective working relationships, enabling the project to provide information and influence officials to champion the domestication and implementation of the Protocol. This has helped to offset extremely low levels of awareness and understanding of the Protocol at the highest levels.
- In campaigning for domestication of the Protocol, LHRC has found that a lot rests on the political will of politicians and policy-makers. During 2010, the political focus was on a popular 'Law of the Child' which had recently been passed by parliament. In 2011, political pressure and popular support has been pushing for a new constitution. This has meant that civil society organisations find it harder to garner support for campaigns and movements that are not related to this new national priority.



Tanzania is one of seven countries under the Raising Her Voice Pan-African Programme promoting the acceleration of the African Women's Rights Protocol.

Raising Her Voice is a five-year programme which promotes the rights and capacity of poor women to engage effectively in governance at all levels. This is to be achieved through enabling their voices to be heard and increasing their influence, and by making institutions more accountable to women.

Working through local partners in 17 countries, Raising Her Voice has significant funding from DFID and is co-ordinated by Oxfam GB.

