

# COVID-19 & Gender: Building Forward Better on Gender Equality & Women Empowerment in Eritrea

## Summary

This brief explores the work of the UN in Eritrea to complement the government's efforts to promote gender equality and women empowerment. It outlines the challenges and risks related to the global COVID-19 pandemic to gender equality in Eritrea, which could inform the formulation and implementation of the UN Eritrea Socio-Economic assessment Recovery Plan (SERP). The Brief aims to present ways in which the negative impacts of COVID-19 can be responded to in a gender-sensitive and women-empowering fashion, according to the SDGs, to 'build back better.' Lastly, it sets out recommendations on ensuring gender equality in the recovery process, focusing on women's empowerment in the decision-making processes related to COVID-19 response and economic development. It guides the planning and preparation of a forward-looking response to COVID-19 in Eritrea. 'Building back better', especially for Eritrea, means ensuring no one is left behind, and that gender equality and women's participation are integrated into crisis prevention, preparedness, and recovery from the earliest stages

## Introduction

The work of the UN in Eritrea complements the efforts of the Government of the State of Eritrea (GoSE) to promote gender equality and women empowerment to ensure sustainable development initiatives. Eritrea is a state party to several Conventions, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW of 1979), since 1995. The latter is a stark demonstration of its commitment and selfless action to prohibit and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to promote women's empowerment.

Efforts continue to be made to improve women's place in the country's socio-economic and political life to make women active agents of change and promote sustainable development<sup>1</sup>. To complement this effort, UNDP and UNFPA, in partnership with sister Agencies in Eritrea, are committed to supporting the GoSE by enhanc-

ing the awareness of the role of women in the socio-economic, political, and cultural transformation of the country, by upholding and effectively implementing the equal rights of women and by engaging in meaningful and active participation of women across all sectors of the economy.

This is in line with UNDP and UNFPA's commitment to make Gender Equality and women's empowerment the center of all their interventions as well as essential aspects of "leaving no one behind," which is one of the guiding principles of the UN 2030 Agenda. Nevertheless, the global COVID-19 pandemic places new risks and challenges towards achieving gender equality and women empowerment. It could reverse the gains made towards meeting SDG 5 to Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It is

1. NUEW Strategic Action Plan 2016-2020

worth noting that despite prior challenges posed during the two decades of isolation, “Eritrea achieved the MDGs on women’s dignified life including health and education and is mobilizing and organizing capacity for the effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.”<sup>2</sup> As seen in most countries, including Eritrea, the pandemic has exposed the vulnerability and even systemic weaknesses in socio-economic and political institutions that should safeguard women and girls’ rights. The impact of COVID-19 has not only accentuated the existing gender gaps, it has also introduced new risks regarding gender equality, all of which continue to impact on LDCs, including Eritrea singularly. Therefore, the pandemic’s medium and long-term effects and its containment measures should be foreseen and responded to. Women and girls are likely to be the hardest hit by this pandemic as they remain the backbone of economic recovery in all communities.

Across the world, the containment and lockdown measures resulted in significant impacts on people’s lives and livelihoods. As a result, countries are now faced with significant health, financial and economic crises,

all of which interact elaborately. In Eritrea, as is the case in other African states, most girls and women carry the burden of care, including family responsibilities. Before the containment and lockdown measures were instituted, most women were active in the informal sector, especially in the food sector. However, the lockdown has forced them to temporarily close their businesses and survive on their bare minimum wage. While the lockdown measures are crucial in limiting the spread of COVID-19, they will likely have a devastating impact on women and girls, with those from vulnerable and hard to reach communities being the most affected.

Such risks include domestic violence and exploitation, especially for girls, teenage and underage pregnancies, limited access to reproductive health services, maternal, newborn and child services, and poor economic well-being. Therefore, all stakeholders must place women and girls – their inclusion, representation, rights, equality, and protection – at the center of their response planning to reach the necessary and effective outcomes.

<sup>2</sup> CEDAW report CEDAW/C/ERI/6.

## The status of women in Eritrea

As noted earlier, women in Eritrea have played an essential role in their country’s history and are considered the pillars of the struggle for independence. The Eritrean National Legal Framework promotes gender equality and provides exceptional protection and rights for women through various proclamations<sup>3</sup>. In general, gender equality is granted by a strong legal and institutional basis. Despite these legal frameworks, the implementation mechanisms by which policies can be translated into proactive and sustained practice are not entirely in place. The responsibility to uphold the principle of equality is limited to the State or political authorities, although the public policy-makers, the private sector, the traditional leaders (elders in communities), including the civil society, also have to ensure its implementation<sup>4</sup>.

### a. Leadership and decision making

In Eritrea, the participation of women, in general, has been notable and promising in political and public decision-making, as evidenced by the successful outcome of the containment measures taken by the

Ministry of Health. The 1994 Eritrean National Charter explicitly states that, ‘In Eritrea, there shall not be any position exclusively reserved for men that cannot be attained by women’. Hence, at policy level there is no segregation at the outset. Women’s right to vote, to elect and be elected democratically is guaranteed and practiced. The representation of women in other areas of public life is promising. In the National Assembly, for example, women held 22 % of the seats of 150 representatives according to latest CEDAW state Party report of 2020.

Special institutional measures have been implemented by Eritrean ministries to include women in decision-making as per the government policies, including e.g. requirement of 30 % participation of women in national, regional and local assemblies and at least in community courts, sport federations and land committees. However, despite this progress there is still relatively limited women participation in decision making in the public and private sphere, and the unemployment and illiteracy rates among women are significant in the country.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 1; See: e.g. Land proclamation No. 58/1994; Labor proclamation No. 118/2001; Proclamation No. 158/2007 on the Abolition of Female Circumcision

<sup>4</sup> National Policy on Gender – State of Eritrea – January 2004

The number of parliamentary seats held by women, according to the 2020 CEDAW Report



## b. Access to justice

In Eritrea, effort has been made to implement the legal and institutional provisions on women equality and empowerment. *De jure* rights of women are augmented by awareness raising campaigns in order to allow women to know about, claim and exercise their rights. To enhance the de facto rights of women and duties in the community, the Ministry of Justice has been conducting awareness programmes via the media outlets and other platforms.

However, the existence of traditional prejudice, lack of knowledge and insufficient legal services and attitudes remains a challenge for the realization of *de facto* rights. In addition to the challenges relating to implementation and knowledge, the existing legal framework is also undermined by harmful cultural beliefs and practices that do not recognize women equally as men. Due to customary and religious laws, cultural attitudes, and social pressure, some are reluctant to pursue their court cases even after women are aware of their fundamental legal rights. Taking a chance forward can be a stigmatization source and can threaten family stability, cohesion, respect and unity.

## c. Economic empowerment

Livelihood and informality or heavy presence in the informal economy is the biggest challenge women in Eritrea face. Inadequate and few frameworks, capacities, and skills hinder their efforts to break from informality chains. However, various programs are put in place to support female entrepreneurs: Women have equal opportunities to acquire license in all sectors of the economy without any restriction and discrimination. During the CEDAW reporting period, it was highlighted that of the total licenses issued, 58.8 % were acquired by female applicants.

In addition, the adoption of the Civil Code of 2015 recognizes equal power and status of the spouses. These are vital rights necessary for women's economic empowerment and for support in moving out of informality. Nevertheless, the requirement of completion of national service for the acquisition of nationality unduly constrains the possibility for women to enjoy full access to economic and social rights, including the right to employment and the right to access to land.

From the table and figure 2 below, it is apparent that even with the significantly higher number of women in the working-age population (54% female and about 46% male), the number of men participating in the labour force is much higher (about 84%) than women's participation in the labour force (about 73%). The latter could be pointing to inequalities in the labour market (the formal economy) and provides further evidence on the challenges of women's economic empowerment in Eritrea.

## Female and Male Labor Force Participation

*Numeric and percentage distribution of Labor Force population*

Sex	Working age population	labor force population	Labor force participation rate
Male	883,460	732,820	83.9
Female	1,038,050	755,708	72.8

Source: MOLSW 2015/2016.

## Occupations with the highest employment

The Top 9 Occupations	Total	Male	Female
Eritrea	100	100	100
1 Agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	42.6	42.8	42.4
2 Service and sales workers	13.7	8.4	18.9
3 Technicians and associate professionals	11.6	19.7	3.7
4 Craft and related trades workers	10.2	7	13.3
5 Elementary occupations	8.3	8	8.6
6 Professionals	5.5	6.1	4.8
7 Clerical support workers	5.3	3.7	6.9
8 Plant and machine operators and assemblers	1.6	2.8	0.3
9 Managers	1.2	1.3	1.1

Source: MLSW, 2017.

Figure 2: Eritrean population under the working age



## d. Education

GoSE realizes that the extensive use of its human capital is a pre-requisite and an essential condition for sustainable development. Education is a fundamental human right for all Eritrean citizens, and every child is entitled to get equal access and opportunity. In this vein, equity considerations are promoted to avoid any discrimination in education provision. GoSE continues to apply temporary special measures to increase women's representation in national, regional, and local assemblies and to promote women and girls' access to higher education and technical and vocational training.

However, the lack of clear time frames and benchmarks for implementing such measures hinders their effectiveness. Concerning the right and access to girls' education, persistently low school enrollment rates, retention, and completion, with significant discrepancies between rural and urban areas, remain as matters of concern. The root causes of girls dropping out of schools, such as child and/or forced marriage, teenage pregnancy, lack of gender-separate sanitary facilities, long distances to schools, migration, and poverty, have not been adequately addressed.



**e. Gender based violence**

The absence of comprehensive legislation specifically criminalizing all forms of gender-based violence as well as the lack of shelters, safe spaces, and rehabilitation programmes for survivors and statistical data on the number of complaints, investigations, prosecutions, and sentences imposed in cases of gender-based violence hinders the effectiveness and efficiency of the general prohibition of violence against women.

The establishment of anti-Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Underage Marriage (UAM) committees throughout the nation at the grass-root level since 2006 has been an innovative strategy to eliminate these harmful traditional practices. According to the Government CEDAW report (para. 48): “the assessment on the prevalence rate of FGM made among all women and girls in 1995 was 95%, the same approach that followed in 2002 resulted in 89%.

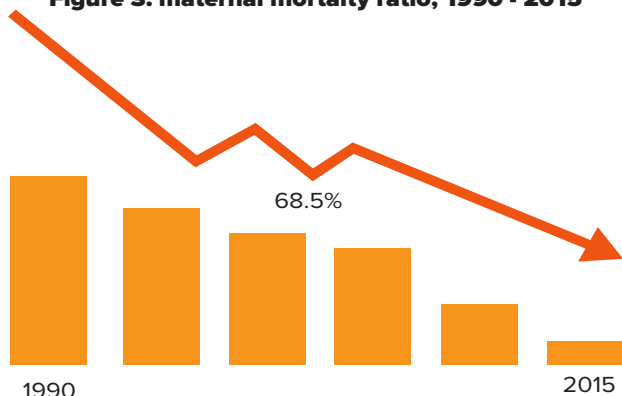
In 2014 selected mapping conducted in 135 villages for girls under ages of 5 showed a dramatic drop of 90%”<sup>5</sup>. Issues of FGM, UAM and other harmful practices all create an unfriendly environment for women socially, politically and economically in Eritrea.

Persistent patriarchal attitudes and discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and society underpin these harmful practices. Whereas FGM and UAM have been prohibited in law and condemned by religious leaders, there is a risk these traditional harmful practices will increase during the pandemic and its containment measures.

**f. Health**

The GoSE has taken actions to support equitable access and quality health service, focusing on primary health care. It has ensured health service to more than 60% of the population residing in a 5 km radius of a health facility and 80% within a 10 km radius. Maternal and child health services are part of the primary basic health care package given free of charge or on an affordable nominal fee. The Maternal Mortality Ratio has decreased by 68.5% from 1990 to 2015 (WHO, 2015).

**Figure 3: maternal mortality ratio, 1990 - 2015**



**Impacts of COVID-19**

As various global sources related to COVID-19 have established, the pandemic’s adverse effects will likely hit the most vulnerable the hardest. The pandemic has amplified and heightened all existing inequalities, and thus, its negative impact on women and girls must be given special attention.

**a. Limited access to information**

Despite Eritrea’s progress in promoting primary health-care access, there are still challenges and contrasts related to gender inequality, such as high drop out from secondary schools. The lack of awareness and adequate access to information to guarantee women’s equal rights and protection is likely to be amplified during the pandemic. The indirect or unintentional implications of discrimination are emerging due to a lack of awareness and harmful practices.

Illiteracy and limited access to information among women, especially in rural areas, causes a lack of knowledge of the relevant rights and enforcement. Containment measures linked to the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to decrease women’s access to information further, as many formal and informal information channels are excluded, and institutional structures supporting women’s rights are out of action. The low-levels of awareness and knowledge of gender-sensitive laws both among women and the general public remain a challenge.

The gender stereotypes and negative cultural practices are likely to be strengthened during the social isolation related to COVID-19. Thus, immediate steps are required to ensure that COVID-19 does not reverse the gender equality progress achieved in recent decades. Altogether, the challenges relating to implementing the advancements in women’s rights and empowerment at the policy level are likely to increase during the pandemic. The risk of regression in various achievements must be acknowledged and responded to.

**b. Participation and inclusion**

According to the CEDAW report, “to date, Eritrea has reached one doctor to 16 000 patients who were 1 to 37 000 in 1991,” with a slight increase of women health workers further buttressing their essential role in the COVID-19 response as an avenue towards gender equality. However, the exclusion of women from the COVID-19 response planning and decision-making could potentially lead to mistargeted actions and further marginalization of women and girls that would not reach those left behind. The long-term negative impacts of the pandemic will not be addressed.

<sup>5</sup> CEDAW report CEDAW/C/ERI/6

### **c. Increased burden of unpaid care work**

The pandemic and its containment measures has had the effect of increasing gender stereotypes and strengthening traditional gender roles in every country of the world including in Eritrea . The increased amount of unpaid house and care work often falls on the shoulders of women and girls. Simultaneously, the opportunities for self-development and skills training is limited. This is likely to affect both the ability and self-esteem of women to participate in economic and political decision-making, even after the pandemic.

### **d. Food security**

One of the immediate impacts of this pandemic is a dramatic rise in food insecurity due to the devastating disruptions to the global and local food supply chain, in addition to the locust invasion in the horn of Africa region. The Eritrean economy relies significantly on agriculture, where women play a crucial role, holding about 32% of the agricultural land. Nevertheless, due to the patriarchal nature of the society, men often control agricultural products.

Women's labour in farming activities, like weeding, planting, and harvesting, is not given due value as their contribution is considered informal or domestic. The impacts of COVID-19 and the simultaneous locust outbreak pose a severe threat to food security, affecting women-led households the hardest since they often lack the necessary safety nets. Moreover, food and nutrition distribution within households is often inequitable. When it comes to the harmful effects related to COVID-19, there is a risk that women in Eritrea will be disproportionately affected and left even further behind when the economy starts recovering.

### **e. Education**

One of the most severe and far-reaching negative impacts of the COVID-19 and its containment measures is the school closure and its effects on girls' education in the long run. Although Eritrea has made great strides in enrolling more children in school during recent years, the impact of school closures may lead to thousands of girls dropping out of school before they complete their education. Especially girls live in poverty, girls living with disabilities - their caregivers - or those living in rural, isolated locations. The increasing burden of domestic and care work resulting from the pandemic is most often borne by women and girls, which will affect their access to education and adult training.

### **f. Health**

The pandemic is likely to affect the accessibility of women to adequate health services. Women and girls have unique health needs. The shortage of suitable doctors

in the country to address their needs, the fact that they are generally less likely to access quality health services, essential medicines and vaccines, maternal and reproductive health care, or routine health checkups - especially in rural, hard to reach and remote communities will further reduce their access to adequate health services.

During the global pandemic, women's unique health needs are likely to gain less attention, and their decision-making is reduced. Fear of infection may also keep women from seeking treatment, thus increasing the health risks related to reproductive health. Family planning and other sexual and reproductive health services and commodities, including those related to menstrual health, are central to women and girls' health, empowerment, and dignity.

### **g. Gender based violence**

The economic and social stress caused by the pandemic, economic dependency of women, restricted movement and social isolation measures, which could lead to a potential increase in Gender-Based Violence. Many women are in 'lockdown' at home with their abusers while being cut off from normal support networks.

## Recommendations

As noted earlier, this policy brief’s goal is to ensure that gender issues are integrated into the national/UN socio-economic economic assessment and recovery plan/strategy for COVID-19. It requires considering the gender sensitivity of all response, recovery, and development measures and building the institutional setting free from any structural or practical barriers to women’s participation.

To meet these requirements, the UN must adopt a two-pronged approach. One that identifies women specific interventions was that women are affected the most due to the pandemic and secondly to ensure gender mainstreaming across all response, recovery, and development measures. This approach will focus on three tasks:



### Women’s meaningful economic and political empowerment.

Studies demonstrate that most rapid economic development in communities has been achieved through women’s empowerment and meaningful participation. Therefore, socio-economic barriers preventing women from fully and equally participating must be articulated and addressed as part of UNDP and UNFPA’s program interventions. Efforts should be made to tackle women’s work in the informal sector and make their contributions visible.

Besides, efforts should be made to support outreach campaigns to promote women’s leadership and contributions in the COVID-19 preparedness and response. Existing partnerships with women leaders and women-led organizations should be utilized to advance women’s voice and decision-making. One of the very useful initiatives was the targeting of community opinion leaders – traditional circumcisers, elderly women who command respect, and religious leaders who are the moral authority of the society. Traditional and religious leaders at the local level should open up consultations with women and women’s groups, ensuring that women’s needs are included in the key

decision-making process. Women participation and involvement in local and community activities and administration affairs must be encouraged and supported<sup>6</sup>.

In addition, NUEW and other grassroots organizations, as well as local communities, tend to have more knowledge on the fundamental reasons behind women’s limited economic and political participation of women. Empowerment and active participation of women in the COVID-19 decision-making are vital as leaders tend to bring their own experience to the table and reduce the space for a more diverse and rich experience from all walks of life and wealth.

Women also prioritize basic needs such as clean and safe water and health care in their political decision-making to make better spending choices that benefit the whole family. Women are generally more likely to prioritize a broader interpretation of economic reconstruction. Empowerment of women covers economic, political participation and social cohesion, and there is a strong interconnectedness among them all. Empowering Eritrean women to be active participants in the economy is vital for enhancing their overall status.

The active participation of women in decision-making is essential in its own right and crucial for advancing their economic, legal and social empowerment, which is necessary to secure their due share of the benefits created therein<sup>7</sup>. Both public and private entities should be encouraged to provide the training required to make more significant decision-making roles.

All necessary measures must be taken to define and remove impediments to women’s participation in the country’s political life<sup>8</sup>. Women’s independence and autonomy should be invested through programmes facilitating access to bank loans, credit guarantees, micro-credit, markets, business scale-up, common production facilities, and other production systems. Women’s employability should be improved in the formal sector while establishing a social security system for vulnerable women, particularly those employed in the agricultural and domestic sectors. Women-led households must be properly reached and assisted in the aftermath of the pandemic as women are often absent from decision-making platforms despite their presence in agriculture.

One of the beneficial initiatives targets community opinion leaders – traditional circumcisers, older women who command respect, and religious leaders who are the society’s moral authority. Traditional and religious

<sup>6</sup> National Policy on Gender – State of Eritrea – January 2004  
<sup>7</sup> National Policy on Gender – State of Eritrea – January 2004  
<sup>8</sup> National Policy on Gender – State of Eritrea – January 2004

leaders should open up consultations with women and women's groups at the local level, ensuring that women's needs are included in the critical decision-making process. Women participation and involvement in local and community activities and administration affairs must be encouraged and supported<sup>9</sup>. Besides, NUEW and other grassroots organizations and local communities know the fundamental reasons behind women's limited economic and political participation.

The goal is to increase women's participation in the development process by involving women in planning, managing, and implementing development projects and programmes<sup>10</sup>. It requires fighting gender stereotypes and advancing women's capacity through skills training and targeted micro-credit programs to foster their businesses capacity, productivity, and competitiveness as well as raise awareness and move towards challenging and changing norms, beliefs and stereotypes. It is a promising area in fighting poverty and vulnerability of women, specifically female-headed families by creating employment opportunities.

Women's economic empowerment is not limited to income generation<sup>11</sup>. It provides women access to information on their rights, which helps them reverse their lack of power, loss livelihood and food insecurity and economic dependence at home<sup>12</sup>. Intervention to reduce the burden of unpaid care work requires policy responses to be proposed. UNDP and UNFPA could initiate some research, advocacy and policy measures through budget allocations (gender-responsive budgeting). Efforts will also be made to identify targeted interventions to support women in the informal economy to graduate to formality.

### Collecting data and information for a targeted response

Experience shows that sufficiently bold measures that put people at the centre of crisis response and recovery can lead to better, more equitable and resilient outcomes for all. The UN gender-sensitive COVID-19 response should be constructed to support women and girls' empowerment by targeting gender-specific interventions and addressing gender concerns in developing, planning, implementing, and evaluating all policies and programs.

The GoSE with UNDP and UNFPA's joint support and other UN Agencies should invest in disaggregated data to achieve this. Henceforth, rely on gender analysis and sex-disaggregated data and pursue integrated, cross-sectoral approaches to address interconnected development challenges. One of the biggest challenges to building a well-targeted COVID-19 response in reaching those left furthest behind in Eritrea is the lack of sufficient evidence and data. The general lack of statistical data disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, disability, geographical location and socio-economic background is a matter of concern.

itrea is the lack of sufficient evidence and data. The general lack of statistical data disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, disability, geographical location and socio-economic background is a matter of concern.

UNDP and UNFPA are in the process of providing support to the GoSE in this field. This will allow Eritrea to collect data necessary to assess women's situation accurately, determine the pandemic's impacts, develop informed and targeted policies, and systematically monitor and evaluate progress achieved. UNDP and UNFPA's work to advance women's rights, empowerment and participation, and gender equality and equitable service delivery within the country, calls for long-term investments in building data collection capacities, including through civil registration systems.

It includes the need to collect gender-disaggregated data on the impact of COVID-19. Therefore, local authorities' capacity building to gather data and secure government facilities for their processing and policy-making is vital. To achieve a gender-sensitive response plan, collaboration and cooperation with national and grassroots associations such as the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) to collect information on the situation and needs are of the utmost importance. The GoSE has mandated the NUEW to work as the machinery for the advancement of gender equality. NUEW works in coordination with concerned government institutions, the civil society and the international community. It has established a network of offices inside and outside the country<sup>13</sup>. NUEW membership has increased by 56% over ten years or at an annual rate of 5.6%. These figures constitute 10% of Eritrea's female population, reckoning the NUEW as a legitimate representative and women leader.

NUEW also has considerable experience in co-coordinating and implementing programmes and projects that target Eritrean women<sup>14</sup>. It is critical to have accurate information to underpin and plan interventions. Field surveys can be a useful method to obtain data and statistics to inform planning. Consultations with women and men impacted by response measures will identify inequalities and provide gendered information.

Other local actors and institutions such as health care services, civil society organizations and communities can be reached out to collect valuable data required for more targeted and effective response. GoSE, UN and the civil society must work together to advance social cohesion and gender equality while upholding human rights and the rule of law. It is also essential for mapping the activities that have previously been noted successful and those that have not.

Local knowledge and experiences need to be given high-

9 National Policy on Gender – State of Eritrea – January 2004  
10 NUEW Strategic Action Plan 2016-2020  
11 NUEW Strategic Action Plan 2016-2020  
12 NUEW Strategic Action Plan 2016-2020

13 NUEW Strategic Action Plan 2016-2020  
14 NUEW Strategic Action Plan 2016-2020



er priority in the design and implementation of economic initiatives. Interventions that would specifically, or as a priority, target women must be identified. It requires the development of gender-sensitive indicators for monitoring the impact of policies and development programs<sup>15</sup>.

### Information sharing and knowledge management

Knowledge is power. Women in Eritrea must be adequately informed on COVID-19 related information to take an active role in recovery planning. Similarly, the general public must be adequately informed of the rights of women and the enforcement therein. Ongoing awareness campaign and education is thus an essential element of the strategy.

Women typically have lower access to information, and their information sources are also likely to be different from men. Making sure COVID-19 related communications and public health messages target and reach women is critical. Women and women's organizations play a significant role in communities' conduits and should be valued, communication partners. Information needs to be communicated through channels that directly reach the most vulnerable, supporting their needs. The awareness of available support and resources should be shared among the women in urban and rural areas using suitable communication channels (e.g. the NUEW radio program). Similarly, awareness of women's rights to abolish FGM, under-age marriage, and gender-based violence can be shared via available communication channels. Influential community members can also spread information. Before the pandemic, a popular movement to ban FGM and UMC in many Sub-regions had gained momentum.

The official declaration by religious leaders, both Muslim and Christian, in 2016 categorically condemned and resolved to abolish FGM, under-age marriage and rape. More comprehensive community outreaches can be effectively achieved – especially in low-literacy and multilingual environments - through radio, including programming sharing COVID-19 information and stories from health experts, community leaders, and other community members. Use of local and sign languages and programming targeting varied audience (women, children, men., people with disabilities) will widen the campaigns' reach and effectiveness.

It is necessary to conduct awareness-raising campaigns for politicians, community and religious leaders, the media and the general public to enhance the understanding that the full, equal, free and democratic participation of women on an equal basis with men in political and public life is a requirement for achieving political stability and economic development in the State party.

<sup>15</sup> National Policy on Gender – State of Eritrea – January 2004

## Conclusion

Eritrea has made strides in the area of development. Its aspiration for development will be realized when the full potential is brought into the development process. It means the effective and widespread participation of women in Eritrea in their economic, political, social, and cultural lives. With the spread of the COVID-19, the gains made in the past decades in gender equality are at risk of being rolled back. However, times of crisis and destruction also present opportunities.

The post-crisis recovery process offers an opportunity to start afresh – to design targeted governance, economical solutions to the benefit of gender equality and women's empowerment. The nation cannot solve these global challenges without women's contributions and voices. COVID-19 is a challenge for global health systems and a test of the human spirit, solidarity, and cooperation.

Therefore, recovery must lead to an equal world that is more resilient to future crises. The famous motto during Eritrean struggle for independence 'Equality through participation' served as a mobilization slogan and a useful guideline in the struggle for women's empowerment in Eritrea. The phrase is still adequate and even more relevant in the response and recovery process of the COVID-19 pandemic, and calls for gender-sensitive and women empowering actions.

## References

1. UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 18 December 1979
2. CEDAW, Sixth Periodic Report submitted by Eritrea under article 18 of the Convention, 12 April 2019. CE-DAW/C/ERI/6
3. UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2021
4. UNDP Eritrea Country Office, gender Equality Strategy 2018-2021
5. UN Rapid Assessment on Socio-economic Impacts of the COVID-19 in Eritrea, May 2020
6. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, September 1995
7. Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2 on mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system
8. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security
9. General Assembly resolution 71/243 of 21 December 2016 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for the development of the United Nations system.
10. National Policy on Gender, State of Eritrea, January 2004
11. EMPOWERING WOMEN: Eritrea's Achievements and Experience
12. NUEW Strategic Action Plan 2016-2020






# Results Framework


## Women meaningful economic and political empowerment

**Goal 1 - End poverty in all its forms everywhere**



**SDG 1.4** By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance


**Goal 2 - End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture**



**SDG 2.2** By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons


1. Women access to basic needs (SDG 2,3, 4)

**Goal 4 - Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all**



1. Women access to basic needs (SDG 2,3, 4)


**Goal 6 - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all**



**SDG 6.2** By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations

1. Women access to clean and safe water (SDG 6)

**Goal 5 - Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**



**SDG 5.5** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

1. Women's Empowerment and Meaningful participation
2. Women's voice and decision-making
3. Women's participation in local and community activities
4. Women's participation in administrations affairs
5. Increase women participation in the development process (planning, managing and implementing)


**SDG 5. A** Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.

1. Women access to clean and safe water (SDG 6)
2. Women access to basic needs (SDG 2,3, 4)
3. Women access to health (SDG 3)
4. Establish social security systems for women employed in agricultural and domestic sectors (SDG 8)

**SDG 5.C** Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

1. Increase women participation in the development process (planning, managing and implementing)

**Goal 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full productive employment and decent work for all.**



**SDG 8.3** Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services

1. Promote micro-credit program

**SDG 8.5** By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

1. Increase women participation in the development process (planning, managing and implementing)
2. Reduce the burden of unpaid care work (SDG 8)


**SDG 8.6** By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training

1. Promote training skills

**SDG 8.8** Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment

1. Establish social security systems for women employed in agricultural and domestic sectors (SDG 8)
2. Promote income generation for Women (SDG 8)

**Goal SDG 16 - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.**




**SDG 16.7** Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

1. Advance women's self esteem and Push back gender stereotypes


**SDG 16.10** Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

1. Promote access to information on their rights (SDG 16)

**Collecting data and information for a targeted response**




**Goal 16 - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.**



**SDG 5.C** Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

1. Support UN Gender sensitive Covid 19 response
2. Advance social cohesion and gender equality while upholding human rights and the rule of law

**Goal 17 Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development**



**SDG 17. 18** By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

1. Invest in gender disaggregated data
2. Collection of sufficient evidence and data
3. Invest in building data collection capacities; including through registration systems


**SDG 17.14** Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development

1. Secure Government facilities for processing and policymaking


**Goal SDG 17.15** Respect each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development

1. Support NUEW to work as the machinery for the advancement of gender equality
2. Support NUEW to coordinate and implement programmes and projects for Eritrean women
3. Other local and institutions such as health care services, civil society organizations and communities can be reached out to collect valuable data required for more targeted and effective response.
4. Give local knowledgeable and experience higher priority in the design and implementation of economic initiatives
5. Development of national gender sensitive indicators for monitoring the impact of policies and development programs

**Information Sharing and knowledge management**




**Goal 5 - Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**



**SDG 5.5** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

1. Enhance in the communities the full, equal, free and democratic participation of women in economic and political arenas

**SDG 16 - Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.**



**SDG 16.10** Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

1. Promote access to information
2. Promote awareness campaign and education
3. Raise awareness of women's rights to abolish FGM, under-age marriage, and gender based violence
4. Promote comprehensive community outreaches, hard to reach areas and multilingual environment







# COVID-19 & Gender in Eritrea



Copyright © UNDP and UNFPA 2021. All rights reserved. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations, including UNDP or UNFPA.

This policy brief was written by Pauliina Noranta, Rule of Law Analyst, UNDP Eritrea and Jacqueline Nzoyihera, Human Rights Specialist, UNDP Eritrea, with contributions from James Wakiaga, Resident Representative, UNDP Eritrea, Yordanos Mehari, Assistant Representative, UNFPA Eritrea. We acknowledge the support of Odette Kabaya, Regional Gender Advisor and Team Leader RSCA, Cleopatra Phiri-Hurungo, Programme Specialist, RSCA, Marie Claire Nishimwe, Gender Analyst, RSCA. Editing and designing by William Sila, Communications and Knowledge Management Officer, UNDP Eritrea.

## CONTACTS

**United Nations Development Programme**



**United Nations Population Fund**



**United Nations Offices  
P. O. Box 5366  
HDAY Street, Asmara, Eritrea**