

In 1991, at the start of a decade of devastating conflicts, UNIFEM was among the first international agencies to understand that 'gender-neutral' humanitarian assistance often means that women are short changed on resources and vulnerable to abuse. A project in Liberia became an early model for improving displaced women's food security, shelter and income generation. By 1994, UNIFEM had created the African Women in Crisis (AFWIC) programme to link responses to women's immediate humanitarian needs with the provision of skills and resources required once they return home. AFWIC has piloted strategies used across Africa, from legal reforms protecting women refugees to the paired provision of trauma counselling with job skills training.

Milestone

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Mobilizing Women Voters in the Aftermath of War

On 8 November 2005, Liberian women flocked in large numbers to the polling stations to cast their vote in a presidential run-off election that saw Ellen Johnson Sirleaf emerge as the first democratically chosen female Head of State in Africa.

The large turnout of women could not be taken for granted - this became obvious not long after the registration process started in April 2005 and only

20 per cent of those signing up to vote were female. Gender advocates knew they had to reverse this. Led by the Ministry of Gender and Development, and supported by UNIFEM, they embarked on a major campaign to educate voters and ensure that women's voices would be at the heart of democratic decisions that would pave the way from Liberia's war-ravaged past to a peaceful future.

Mobilizing efforts went into full force. Women



ABOVE: Toward a democratic future: In Liberia, UNIFEM assisted a major voter education campaign.

went from door to door, telling their sisters and daughters, mothers and grandmothers to register to vote. When it turned out that many women working in local markets could not afford to lose a day's income to make the trip to registration centres, volunteers took over their market stalls for a day. Within four weeks, female voter registration peaked at 51 per cent.

In her inaugural speech, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf pledged to "empower Liberian women in all areas of national life". She did not wait to start on this ambitious agenda. Right after the inauguration, a



ABOVE: Women and girls from Darfur. UNIFEM supported the participation of gender experts in the peace talks on the region.

gathering of 200 women served to discuss immediate needs and priorities for future government action with the Minister for Gender and Development and UNIFEM's Executive Director.

In 2005, UNIFEM supported women's political participation in a number of other countries:

- Ahead of the Constitutional Referendum in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNIFEM, together with UNDP and the UN Mission in Congo (MONUC), worked to ensure women's participation through an extensive outreach campaign. More than 50 per cent of all voters were women. The country's new Constitution, which includes key gender equality principles, was adopted by a large majority.
- During the Peace Talks on Darfur, UNIFEM supported the participation of 20 women from Darfur to act as a Gender Expert Support Team and ensure that the negotiations on the peace accords included concrete commitments to women's rights. Together with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), UNIFEM also attached a gender expert to the African Union's Mediation Office to provide daily support to the negotiations, in particular to the 10 women delegates.

Learn more: www.unifem.org/worldwide/africa.php

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Years of Challenge
Years of Change

High-stakes peace negotiations have traditionally been closed to women. UNIFEM has helped women convince the world that peace depends on their participation. In 2000, UNIFEM facilitated the participation of Burundian women in the Arusha peace talks - among the first negotiations to welcome women. Most of the women delegates' recommendations appeared in the final accords and later in the new Constitution of Burundi. That same year, UNIFEM was invited to act as a Technical Advisor to the President of the UN Security Council during the Council's first debate on women, peace and security. The result was the watershed Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for bringing more women to peace tables and into all parts of peacekeeping and reconstruction.

Milestone

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Years of Challenge
Years of Change

UNIFEM has sought innovative ways to help poorer women reap the benefits of globalization. In 1996, a pilot project in Burkina Faso connected small-scale women producers of shea butter, traditionally used in cosmetics and skin care, to flourishing international markets. The project introduced technology and collective production methods for more efficient processing and assisted with access to credit. Two central markets provided ready access to buyers, while regular information on the price, quality and supply requirements of the export market strengthened sales negotiations. Following a trade fair that drew international buyers, women producers signed a major contract with the French cosmetics company L'Occitane. Prices rose 50 per cent.

Milestone

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Africa



Changing Roles - Combating HIV/AIDS

In Mutoko, Zimbabwe, women are no longer alone when it comes to caring for friends and family members with HIV/AIDS. Men in Mutoko have formed a group of volunteers to assist sick neighbours in need of support. They prepare food and fetch water, help with the daily hygiene and provide basic medical care. Or they just spend some time to listen and talk, offering comfort

through company. Men now also work alongside women in community gardens where they grow herbs for use in palliative care for people who are HIV-positive.

The change came about after Mutoko was designated a 'Gender Empowerment Zone' in an effort by UNIFEM to combat HIV/AIDS by focusing on equality between women and men. In training ses-

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Years of Challenge
Years of Change

Raising the visibility of women's rights in regional institutions improves protection records regionally and nationally. UNIFEM has supported gender initiatives at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) since its inception. In 1997, SADC Heads of State signed the Declaration on Gender and Development, a mandate for adopting policies for women's advancement, and established the SADC Gender Unit. The SADC Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus, created in 2002, has partnered with UNIFEM on advocating for a 30 per cent quota for women in politics - today, eight out of 14 SADC members have a quota system. The African Union has also come on board. In 2003, it adopted a women's rights protocol and a 50 per cent quota for women as commissioners.

Milestone

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selling sunflower oil, soap and clothes. Financial independence has given them new confidence - to negotiate safe sex, for example, or to take on leadership in their community. A woman now heads the Mutoko AIDS Action Committee, and others are in decision-making positions on the health, agriculture and education committees.

Most importantly, people have come to realize that everybody benefits. "You see, it's not only women who got empowered," says one man. "It is empowering us to be able to do something positive in our lives, like helping those who need our help."

UNIFEM worked throughout Africa and with a number of partners to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls:

- In Senegal, UNIFEM supported women parliamentarians to use the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as a framework for analysing existing laws and identifying practices that discriminate against HIV-positive women. As a result, a draft law for the protection of people living with HIV/AIDS has been tabled in Parliament.
- In Nigeria, UNIFEM was instrumental in ensuring that gender equality and human rights issues became an integral part of the National AIDS Framework. Through the Gender Technical Committee, a mechanism has been put in place to ensure the Framework's implementation.

Learn more: www.unifem.org/gender_issues/hiv_aids
www.genderandaids.org



ABOVE: A demonstrator in Zimbabwe, where UNIFEM's efforts to combat HIV/AIDS have focused on tackling inequality between women and men.

ABOVE: HIV/AIDS peer counsellors in Senegal during a training session. UNIFEM support to parliamentarians resulted in a draft law for the protection of people living with HIV/AIDS.

sions on gender and human rights, both men and women have come to understand how women's inequality makes them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, and discussion groups on safe sex have served as an opportunity to talk openly about the use of condoms and about risky behaviour. Youth are included in the education programme, and there are now fewer teenage pregnancies.

Not only men have taken on new roles and attitudes. Women have started their own businesses,

LEFT PHOTO BY FINBARR O'REILLY-REUTERS/LANDOV; RIGHT PHOTO BY AP