COUNTRY LEVEL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR LESOTHO

1. Context for EU action on gender equality and women’s empowerment in the country

Gender equality and women empowerment are accepted development targets as they are regarded in a number of international and regional instruments as basic human rights that are central to the achievement of national and global development initiatives. The Government of Lesotho is committed to the promotion of gender equity and empowerment, and this is demonstrated in the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) II that makes it mandatory for all sectors to address gender concerns and issues through their development programmes. The Lesotho Gender and Development Policy 2018-2030 outlines areas of intervention in the advancement of gender equality and reinforces gender-positive legislation outlined in the NSDP II. Promoting gender equality as a key political objective aims at accelerating progress towards including the SDG’s at the core of the 2030 Agenda.

The MIP 2021-2027 outlines that EU assistance to Lesotho will concentrate on two priority areas; with a potential to significantly transform the country’s economy in the medium term;

1. Green and resilient economy
2. Good governance, peaceful and just society.

Under the first priority, EU assistance is targeted to facilitate Lesotho’s move towards a circular economy, that becomes increasingly sustainable and self-sufficient with regard to energy generation and consumption and that provides access to all to energy, water and sanitation. All EU assisted actions will aim at adaptation of climate change and promote gender sensitive and transformative outcomes and results. Under the second priority, the EU assistance is targeted to overcome years of political instability, to reduce adverse practices and improve democratic structures and the Government’s service delivery to the citizenry.

The Gender Country Profile1 outlines the state in the economic sector and socio-cultural context of Lesotho from the point of view of gender equity and equality. The Gender analysis considers policy, legal and institutional frameworks for Lesotho and highlights successes and weaknesses in the pursuit for gender equality. The priorities set out in the Roadmap for engagement with civil society contributed in the analytical basis in the preparation of the Country Level Implementation Plan, this is mainly due the EU making significant contributions to civil society in the areas of gender-sensitive/transformative projects as demonstrated in the financing decision; EU Support to Civil Society in Lesotho.

A consultation and dialogue process that included civil society and the State (The Ministry of Gender and Youth, Sport and Recreation) and the Gender Country Coordinating Mechanism2 were consulted during the drafting of the CLIP. Women’s organizations that provided input were; Women and Law In Southern Africa, Federation of Women Lawyers, She-Hive and Gender-Links Lesotho. The women-led organizations emphasized the need to develop a clear and precise action-plan to further support gender mainstreaming, gender equity and equality particularly in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed new norms; school closures and national lockdowns have increased the risk of child labour, domestic violence, sexual exploitation and early forced marriage. As no EU Member State has a permanent diplomatic mission in Lesotho, none was consulted.

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1 Dated 18.07.2016 and is still valid for the preparation of the CLIP
2 A group of development partners with gender equality as a key priority
2. Selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives

Some critical issues which slow down the gains won for gender equality are; the abuse of women and children, spousal abuse, discrimination against women with regards to inheritance and decision-making, trafficking in persons, injustice of socio-economic and political rights, and limited access to justice service delivery. As outlined in the Gender Action Plan III the EU has selected the following objectives on gender equality and women empowerment to focus in Lesotho, these being significant or principal objectives to the MIP. The main objectives with gender equality as a main objective are; ensuring freedom from all forms of gender based violence, strengthening economic and social rights and empowering women and integrating the women, peace and security agenda. A significant objective of the MIP will be advancing equal participation and leadership of women in political spheres.

To further, the objectives listed above; the EU will engage in the following areas of engagement for gender equality and women empowerment, for Green and Resilient Economy the EU will undertake to promote women and other marginalized groups’ access to and control over productive resources, including land, information, technology, safe water, energy and finance. Further, promote gender-parity and gender sensitization at all economic-decision making levels. Under Good governance, peaceful and just society, the EU will undertake to promote the finalization of specific legislation on gender equality and domestic violence, initiate capacity building through Calls for Proposals of the justice system. This to systematically and routinely protect the vulnerable and deliver gender justice, fairly and speedily and provide continuous gender sensitization on issues of national significance such as the ongoing national reforms and the finalization of the national human rights commission. The EU has engaged civil society in particular women-led organizations in the preparation of the Country level Implementation Plan in order to incorporate the gender-specific needs of women in Lesotho. In the formulation of guidelines for Calls for Proposals we will steer towards actions with at least one action with gender equality as a principal objective.

3. Targeted action(s) supporting gender equality and women’s empowerment

As outlined above the main objectives of the EU outlined in the GAP III are; ensuring freedom from all forms of gender based violence, strengthening economic and social rights, empowering women and integrating the women, peace and security agenda. The rationale behind the selection of these objectives derives from the fact that despite of existing legal frameworks to promote gender equality, women continue to be marginalized in economic and political decision-making platforms, as well in experiencing gender based violence. The progressive legal instruments are: the Legal Capacity of Married Person’s Act, Sexual Offences Act, Land Act and Companies Act. These laws; are intended to assist women with access and control over productive resources and services.

Violence against women continues, is pervasive and seems by all indications, to be on the increase. Reports show that 86% of women experience gender based violence while 41% of men are reported as perpetrators.³ Gender based violence thus presents a major obstacle for women across the country to realize their fundamental, human, sexual and reproductive rights. Poverty in Lesotho is attributable to various factors such as the global economic downturn, climate change, a declining economy and an uncertain political environment thereby affecting women, as they are continually disadvantaged even though they play a vital role in the economy.

³Lesotho Gender and Development Policy 2018-2030
It is expected that upon the review of this plan, the main indicators will be the amendment of the Gender Based Violence Act and increased capacity of the justice system to protect victims in particular of gender based violence. Further, it is expected to concentrate on increased access and control by women to productive resources including; land, safe water and energy for them to make fruitful contributions to the economy.

Dialogue with civil society on gender equality and women’s empowerment will entail;

- Engaging in consultations with women-led civil society organizations to identify instances of discrimination against women and identify options for civil society involvement.
- Integrate and allow access to civil society organizations in national dialogue platforms in particular the ongoing national reforms.
- Support civil society to participate in gender budgeting processes to shape policies and practices that promote gender equality and equity.

Currently, several women’s organizations are receiving support to further gender equality in various areas; and we expect that this support will be continued, through the launching of various Calls for Proposals during the lifetime of the Country Level Implementation Plan under the NDICI.

4. Engage in dialogue for gender equality and women

Substantial engagement with civil society organizations is foreseen to discuss gender sensitive matters in Lesotho and in the design of new programmes in particular with the formulation of guidelines for Calls for Proposals. Civil Society will further be active in the National Reforms Process. Policy dialogues with the Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sports and Recreation is foreseen to tackle gender equality at local and national government. Further engagement is foreseen with other government ministries to highlight on gender mainstreaming activities within various departments. Through these various dialogues, the EU will continue to condemn violations and abuses of women’s rights to support civil society, as well as women and men working for gender equality and women’s empowerment including women’s human rights defenders.

5. Outreach and other communication/public diplomacy activities

During the 2021-2025 period the strategic communication/high level events on gender equality foreseen are as follows;

- The EU will undertake annual dialogues with Government officials and Member States on the current state of affairs in Lesotho in particular address the status of women and the protection of their human rights.
- Quarterly consultations with civil society on ongoing programs or input on project design/initiation with gender as a main priority
- Quarterly Press Briefings with the media on ongoing programmes as well as progress on gender equality and women’s empowerment. This will include press conferences in collaboration with partners or publications released with local media.
- Quarterly Cultural Diplomacy events will be held, with gender one of the thematic areas of discussion. These will include panel discussions, receptions, day-long events on human rights and gender summits. We will support ongoing initiatives by civil society such as NGO Week, where NGO’s based in Lesotho showcase their various programmes and undertake panel discussions with relevant stakeholders.
• **Commemoration of Gender-Sensitive/Responsive Days** recognised under internationally and locally, these being International Women’s Day and 16 days of activism against gender based violence

6. **Technical Facility and/or financial resources allocated to support GAP III implementation**

As the MIP has mainstreamed gender throughout, we foresee to prioritize gender equality throughout all sectors. As there is no specific budget, we do note that support measures for civil society have been earmarked to 7% of the budget in the MIP. As civil society implements grants with gender as principle objective, this is a significant contribution to gender.

Date

Signature of the Head of Delegation