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**CONCEPT PAPER FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE WORKPLACE:**

**SASSA WOMEN’S FORUM**

**BACKGROUND OF THE DOCUMENT**

Notable domestic efforts to increase women’s rights have been made by the South African government, culminating in *South Africa’s National Policy Framework for Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality (2000), this framework is* referred to as the Gender Policy Framework. This Gender Policy Framework established guidelines for South Africa as a nation to take action to remedy the historical legacy by defining new Terms of Reference for interacting with each other in both the private and public spheres. The guidelines are entrenched in institutional framework through laws, policies, procedures and practices which serve to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men in all spheres and structures of government.

In crafting the Gender Policy concept, the following assumptions were made:

* South Africa is considered by some international indicators to be among the upper-middle-income countries of the world, whilst the majority of South Africans live either in abject poverty or in fear of becoming poor.
* Majority of these people are women living in peri-urban and rural areas. The Gender Policy Framework has taken a “basic needs” approach and has prioritized attainment of these ‘basic needs’.
* The “women’s empowerment” approach tends to focus more on practical needs which in itself are complementary to the “basic needs”.
* The Gender Policy Framework is issue driven rather than sector specific and promotes a co-operative approach among sectors towards achieving gender equality, both within and across sectors.
* Each sector has unique issues to address. In turn, these sector issues have unique gender implications. Sectors will therefore need to be able to integrate the principles contained in this Gender Policy Framework into their policy and strategic documents.

**GENDER MAINSTREAMING IS A PERVASIVE THEME AND SHOULD NOT BE SEEN IN ISOLATION OF OTHER VALUE ADDING PROCESSES**

The scope of SASSA’s operation is significant, with a geographical footprint in all nine provinces in the form of Local Offices or Service Points. These workplaces are populated by passionate individuals who are multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary and multi-generational working together towards alleviating poverty and hunger in South Africa.

A question that needs to receive a fair amount of attention at SASSA is “why is there a need to Gender Mainstream while there are practices implemented by SASSA to promote gender equality” and these are amongst others:

* Policies to underscore the importance of gender equality to ensure that established requirements are consistently and systematically implemented;
* Flexible workplace practices – proactive and progressive gender sensitive policies to eliminate barriers – equal opportunities for All – Family Friendly Policies (Different types of leaves), Employee Wellness Programme, EAP, Disabilities Management Policy etc.;
* Leadership oversight and accountability;
* Targeted initiatives – systematic and top down, men, women, and people with disability empowerment programme.

Apart from complying with equity targets, SASSA does not have specific programmes that recognize women as a separate interest group with specific interests and needs. Gender mainstreaming is an essential part of good governance and critical if SASSA wants to ensure policies and programs respond to the needs and interests of all, to ensure that benefits are distributed equitably between men and women.

Women have different needs and priorities from men and are therefore affected differently by policies and equity interventions. Whilst the graph below illustrates near equity, further analysis is required to understand which positions women hold within the organization. It might be that SASSA is employing more women to attain equity targets, but not responding to issues that matters most to uplift and advance women in significant, strategic and decision making positions.

Conversely, the risk of not enhancing gender, diversity and inclusion at SASSA are significant. The SASSA strategic operational objectives as set out for the MTEF period i.e. improving organizational efficiency will be hindered, with a direct impact resulting in SASSA poorly executing its core values, thereby undermining its capability.

**TRANSFORMATION AGENDA**

SASSA is also undergoing Organizational Transformation in which an opportunity exists through the Business Process Engineering (BPR) to enable and align the Women’s Forum initiative to create an enabling environment for gender mainstreaming and gender equality inclusive of women with disabilities and young women.

It is against this backdrop that Organizational Transformation Programmes must be supported to reshape policies, structures, attitudes and behaviors to phase out and balance gender inequalities. The new ‘normal’ also dictates for the organization to develop new skills and new working approaches. However, for this to be a success, the collective efforts of all role players especially the executive team will be required and held accountable (by including this agenda point into executives KPA’s), to ensure that a policy framework is in place, complied with for empowerment, capacity building, mentoring and support of the female employees.

SASSA as with many South African Companies is faced with employment equity challenges as a result of our past. These challenges relate to, inter alia, demographic under-representation of designated groups as well as the unfair treatment of people with disabilities, including non-binary employees (LGBTQ+). It is with this in mind that SASSA needs to formulate strategies to facilitate an alignment to this Policy within its operational environment to reflect social, political and economic empowerment.

Whilst strides have been made by the Agency to address issues of women inequity, the Women’s Forum seek to drill down, evaluate and take deliberate steps to address women empowerment. It must be noted that achieving true gender equality is a complex and ongoing process.

SASSA is also probing whether its business or service offering allows for flexibility to accommodate the ever-changing culture as no single solution fits every need of every employee by introducing the anytime, anywhere, anyplace working model i.e. Working from ‘home’ Policy.

**SASSA HIGH-LEVEL ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS ON GENDER EQUITY**

SASSA firmly endorses the position that soft issues as represented by organizational culture, behavior, and personal background etc., equally important especially when these issues affect women.

To gain an insight, the demographics will be used as a base in order to analyze gaps. The gaps may be in terms of how women are attracted, developed, retained etc. within SASSA and targeted interventions/strategies will be recommended.

Table1: SASSA Demographics of Men and Women

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Branch** | **FEMALE** | | | | | | **F Total** | **MALE** | | | | | | **M Total** | **Grand Total** | **%** |
| **0-6** | **7-8** | **9-10** | **11-12** | **13-15** | **16** | **0-6** | **7-8** | **9-10** | **11-12** | **13-15** | **16** |
| CEO |  |  |  | 1 |  | 1 | **2** |  |  |  |  |  |  | **0** | **2** | **100%** |
| CHIEF OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT | 4 | 4 | 2 |  | 2 |  | **12** | 6 |  |  |  | 2 |  | **8** | **20** | **60%** |
| CORPORATE SERVICES | 12 | 14 | 12 | 9 | 7 |  | **54** | 12 | 11 | 7 | 8 | 9 |  | **47** | **101** | **53%** |
| FINANCE | 16 | 13 | 11 | 6 | 7 |  | **53** | 4 | 8 | 10 | 9 | 8 |  | **39** | **92** | **57%** |
| FRAUD MANAGEMENT AND COMPLIANCE |  | 3 |  |  |  |  | **3** |  | 1 | 2 | 4 | 1 |  | **8** | **11** | **27%** |
| GRANT OPERATIONS | 20 | 10 | 1 | 6 | 1 |  | **38** | 11 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 |  | **24** | **62** | **61%** |
| GRANT POLICY IMPLIMENTATION |  | 1 |  | 1 | 2 |  | **4** |  |  | 1 | 1 | 1 |  | **3** | **7** | **57%** |
| ICT |  | 6 | 3 | 10 | 5 |  | **24** |  | 2 | 1 | 3 | 6 |  | **12** | **36** | **66%** |
| INTERNAL AUDIT AND RISK MANAGEMENT | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 |  | **15** | 2 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 1 |  | **14** | **29** | **51%** |
| STRATEGY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT |  | 3 | 1 | 2 | 5 |  | **11** | 1 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 2 |  | **14** | **25** | **44%** |
| **Grand Total** | **56** | **57** | **33** | **37** | **32** | **1** | **216** | **36** | **30** | **29** | **41** | **33** | **0** | **169** | **385** | **56%** |
| **%** | **60%** | **66%** | **53%** | **47%** | **49%** | **100%** | **60%** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Graph 1: SASSA data analysis based on original approved structure in 2004**

The SASSA Women Satisfaction Survey outcome endorses that the Agency has to be intentional in seeking to empower women with a space to share their thought and ideas since they have limiting beliefs (see attached Annexure).

**COMPOSITION OF THE WOMEN’S FORUM**

SASSA has a fair representation of women across all occupational categories irrespective of race across all Regions where practically possible to ensure that issues affecting women are acknowledged and addressed.

The overall management, control and administration of the Forum shall be vested in the Executive Committee (4 members) that would have been elected into office together with the Extended Committee members comprising of representative of the Regional and Head Office (HO) Women’s Forum Chapters (20 representatives), plus one (1) woman representative from the National Task Team of People with Disabilities.

On the other hand the Regional and HO Women Chapter(s) will comprise of 21 member committee inclusive of the representative of the Regional Task Team of People with Disabilities serving the same minimum period.

Committee members will be selected on the basis of informal leadership competence, commitment to equality, passion relating to issues of women in the workplace and willingness to make a contribution towards SASSA’s Transformation and Equality.

The final accountability for the Women’s Forum rests with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of SASSA however, the Committee is responsible for the development, implementation and monitoring of programmes.

In order to move beyond numbers and ensure there is real and lasting change, membership to the Forum is open to all women and is automatic.

**RESPONSIBILITY OF THE WOMEN’S FORUM COMMITTEE**

Overarching objectives – create an environment that will attract, engage, develop and retain female talent and to make SASSA an employer of choice while the Forum’s objectives are to:

* Respond to the needs of women by supporting their growth;
* Build a community of women professionals and leaders by addressing gender specific competency gaps;
* Amplify the voice and priorities of women by ensuring support and commitment from management and create engagement platforms that will inspire and motivate women, enabling them to network purposefully and support each other.

**The responsibilities of the Committee are as follows:**

* Consult women to identify issues affecting them (inclusive of disability issues);
* Expand and diversify the role of mentorship and sponsorship, including peer to peer network;
* Regular reporting of these issues; and
* Monitor and evaluate progress.

**METHODOLOGY TO INITIATE THE WOMEN’S FORUM**

Communication and awareness resources may include inter alia:

* Circulars;
* Presentations (virtual and physical);
* Pop-ups;
* Themed circulars in line with the National and International Calendars.

*(NB the plan highlighting the above will be developed and shared)*

**TIMELINES**

To develop Agency consensus on a programme of gender policy priorities and programmes to advance the gender agenda in the period 2023-2025.

**RISKS IDENTIFIED**

* The programme failing to take an intersectional approach;
* Feeling of marginalization of other gender i.e. Men and LGBTQ+;
* Not being able to generate enough interest on the targeted group.

**RISK MITIGATION**

* Concerted effort to propel gender and race up the corporate ladder simultaneously rather than silo tactics;
* Gender agenda training and discussions that address differences to generate positive reinforcement.
* Utilize various forms of communication for awareness, visibility and re-enforcement of agreed upon mandates. This will include leveraging on the training initiatives.

**CONCLUSION**

The Agency accepts that change is constant. Not only are the internal and external environment, but it operates as continually evolving but also as the field of the workplace and commits to take the lessons learnt while implementing the action plan and the development in the diversity field to improve and transform the framework.

EXCO is responsible for approving the Concept Document and associated key objectives, performance, benchmarking, targets and revisions thereof as may be appropriate on a periodic basis as presented, and to also consider and approve the budget needs to enable the Forums’ resource requirement.

SASSA is therefore through this document to confirm its commitment to actively seek to create and sustain a workplace that is inclusive and enabling, as the leadership believe that diversity will enrich the quality of the decision making while enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of individuals and invariably that of SASSA. Treating everyone with dignity and fairness is at the core of SASSA’s value and being the right thing to do, to *enable paying the right social grant, to the right person, at the right time and place. NJALO!*

*-End-*