



Consultation response

'Equal Life Chances for All Londoners' GLA Draft Gender Equality Scheme 2010-2011

Submitted to the Greater London Authority

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Understanding and supporting
women and their organisations

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About the Women's Resource Centre

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) is a charity which supports women's organisations to be more effective and sustainable. We provide training, information, resources and one-to-one support on a range of organisational development issues. We also lobby decision makers on behalf of the women's not-for-profit sector for improved representation and funding.

Our members work in a wide range of fields including health, violence against women, employment, education, rights and equality, the criminal justice system and the environment. They deliver services to and campaign on behalf of some of the most marginalised communities of women.

There are over ten thousand people working or volunteering for our members who support almost half a million individuals each year.

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Introduction

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) welcomes the opportunity to feedback on the Greater London Authority's (GLA) Gender Equality Scheme (GES) 2010-2011. We are pleased to see that vital issues to women in London, such as poverty, violence, housing, employment and education are discussed in the document; however we feel that there is much missing. Most glaring is the serious lack of detail in terms of specific objectives, explicit plans for action and clearly defined time scales for their achievement.

Defining equality

In order for the GES to be most effective it is essential that the term 'equality', and in particular an explanation of gender inequality, be included at the outset. Without this definition there is a lack of clarity about what the GLA is trying to achieve. While there are many statistics included in the GES alluding to gender inequality, there is no defined goal towards which the GLA and this GES in particular are aimed.

WRC has gathered evidence that some public authorities are misinterpreting the Gender Equality Duty (GED) and promoting the kind of equality where 'equal' simply means 'the same' – same resources, same access (for example requesting that women's refuges provide services to men). This approach is, in fact, gender neutral, as it does not account for the different needs of women and men. To effectively tackle systematic discrimination, what is needed is **substantive equality**, which ensures that resources are targeted towards need.

As stated by the EU Charter’s website, substantive equality “seeks to highlight significant social obstacles (particularly discrimination based on social characteristics) to equal access to such goods as education, employment, goods and services. For instance, an unequal distribution of childcare responsibilities between women and men may make it more difficult for women with children to undertake jobs with long working hours without additional support or accommodation. Accordingly, merely eliminating sex discrimination on the **hiring** stage may not be enough to ensure that female workers have the same employment opportunities as male workers. It suggests that it may be necessary to take further steps to accommodate or assist female workers with children so that they may compete on equal terms with their male counterparts”¹.

Providing a clear definition of equality at the beginning of the document and outlining the reasons and need for specific measures included in the GES would frame the implementation plans and make the goal of gender equality tangible.

Intersectionality

While, as mentioned above, we welcome the discussion of “some of the key issues facing Londoners where the evidence gathered shows that gender plays a significant role” (such as poverty, violence, health, etc.) we are concerned about the lack of analysis regarding how these ‘key issues’ overlap in women’s lives and can compound the experience of discrimination and inequality.

An intersectional approach “attempts to capture the consequences of the interaction between two or more forms of subordination”². Using this approach would recognise that, for instance the concerns of a poor mother in a violent relationship cannot be disconnected and dealt with separately from each other. Any services or assistance provided to her would be ineffective if they did not take into account all the particulars of her situation. A living wage, for instance, would be an irrelevant solution in her circumstances, as would family friendly working practices, both of which are listed as actions that have been taken by the GLA to tackle poverty.

...intersectionality addresses the way that specific acts and policies operate together to create further disempowerment. For instance, race, ethnicity, gender, or class, are often seen as separate spheres of experience which determine social, economic and political dynamics of oppression. But, in fact, the systems often overlap and cross over each other, creating complex intersections at which two, or three or more of these axis may meet.

Working Group on Women and Human Rights

<http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/bkgdbrfintersec.html>

¹ Taken from EU Charter website 01/07/2010: http://www.eucharter.org/home.php?page_id=95

² Taken from Working Group on Women and Human Rights website 01/07/2010:

<http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/globalcenter/policy/bkgdbrfintersec.html>

Without an intersectional approach to addressing gender inequality, or at the very least recognition of intersectionality, the effectiveness of the GES is compromised.

Themes

The themes chosen for discussion in the GES (poverty, employment and business, education and skills, violence and safety, transport, housing and planning, health and London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games) are clearly important issues for women in London, however there are significant omissions.

Under the 'key issue' of health there is no mention of HIV or sexual health. This is surprising given that London is the epicentre of the UK AIDS epidemic, accounting for around half of all HIV diagnoses in the UK.³ A 2009 London Assembly's Health and Public Services Committee report found that rates of sexually transmitted diseases such as chlamydia and gonorrhoea are higher among London's teenagers than the British average⁴, and a 2008 survey of peoples' attitudes to and knowledge of HIV conducted by the National AIDS Trust found over 90 percent of the British public did not fully understand the ways that HIV is transmitted, with London reportedly being the one of the two least knowledgeable regions.⁵

The omission of teenage pregnancy under health also raises concerns. The London Assembly's Health and Public Services Committee's own report found that teenage pregnancy rates in 18 London boroughs are higher than the national average, and in some London boroughs, 1 in 13 young girls is falling pregnant.⁶ They also point out that one of the challenges to improving young people's sexual health is addressing negative gender stereotypes.⁷

Particularly glaring are the absence of trafficking and prostitution in the section on London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. As stated on the GLA's own website, "*major sporting events are often linked to an upsurge in demand for prostitution, which in turn fuels human trafficking*".⁸ Furthermore, Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking is quoted as saying:

"Women and girls experience violence in a very different way from men. In the vast majority of cases they are targeted not because of what they have done,

³ *AIDS & HIV in the UK - the current situation*. Taken from NAT's website. 02/07/2010: <http://www.avert.org/aids-uk.htm>

⁴ Greater London Authority, Health and Public Services Committee (2009) *Young Londoners' sexual health: An update review*. London. P14

⁵ *AIDS & HIV in the UK - the current situation*. Taken from NAT's website. 02/07/2010: <http://www.avert.org/aids-uk.htm>

⁶ *Young Londoners' sexual health still so poor*. Taken from Greater London Authority's website. 02/07/2010: http://www.london.gov.uk/media/press_releases_london_assembly/young-londoners-sexual-health-still-so-poor

⁷ Greater London Authority, Health and Public Services Committee (2009) *Young Londoners' sexual health: An update review*. London. P8

⁸ *Getting tough on trafficking and prostitution*. Taken from Greater London Authority's website. 02/07/2010: <http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/crime-community-safety/tackling-priority-crimes/violence-against-women/trafficking-prosti>

*but because they are female. The trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and young girls is a particularly brutal form of sexual violence with many of the women and girls involved experiencing high levels of violence and repeated rape.*⁹

Discrimination against women has been identified as one of the root causes of trafficking as discrimination can affect where and when a woman can work, travel, migrate, and make her own decisions.¹⁰ Trafficking and prostitution are given special consideration in the Mayor's strategy to end all forms of violence against women, *The Way Forward*, released earlier this year, thus the reason for their exclusion in the GLA's GES is unclear.

While the above mentioned omissions (HIV, sexual health, teenage pregnancy, trafficking and prostitution) all fall under the categories outlined in the GLA's GES, the question of women's participation in public and civic life is completely absent, and cannot fit into any of the current categories. Women's participation in their communities, voter activity and representation are of paramount importance in achieving gender parity in governing bodies and to having local women's concerns heard.

Women are more interested in local rather than national politics, and the presence of women as representatives increases women's activism¹¹, thus the GLA is perfectly situated to have an impact on women's civic participation. The GLA's GES provides an ideal opportunity to implement some of the Electoral Commission's recommendations on increasing women's participation in public life, such as women's support networks, groups and offices.

Supporting women's organisations provides another significant opportunity for nurturing women's participation in the life of their communities. Women's organisations work on a wide range of issues including violence, poverty, asylum and immigration, employment, substance abuse, health, education, criminal justice and the environment. They deliver a wide range of specialist, and sometimes life-saving, services such as emergency refuge accommodation, counselling, advice, training, childcare, outreach and support groups. Many are formed by local residents to address issues in their own geographic and cultural communities and thus understand their particular needs.

The importance of women-only spaces provided by these organisations cannot be underestimated. In 2007, WRC commissioned a poll to ask women in the UK about their views and experiences of women-only services.

- 84% said that in women-only spaces they felt more comfortable to talk about their lives and experiences;

⁹ *Getting tough on trafficking and prostitution*. Taken from Greater London Authority's website. 02/07/2010: <http://www.london.gov.uk/priorities/crime-community-safety/tackling-priority-crimes/violence-against-women/trafficking-prosti>

¹⁰ Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (2010) *Beyond Borders: Exploring the Links Between Trafficking and Gender*. Bangkok. P8

¹¹ *Gender and Political Participation*. The Electoral Commission. April 2004. Taken from Fawcett Society website. 07/07/2010: <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/documents/Gender%20and%20voting.pdf>

- 71% stated they felt safer; and
- 60% felt more confident to participate.¹²

Women-only services provide women with access to childcare, training and employment allowing women to lift their families out of poverty, and thus to make a positive contribution to the economy. They enable women who are marginalised or excluded to integrate better into society or with people from different backgrounds and they contribute to increased integration and community cohesion by empowering women to participate in wider society. London is home to hundreds of women's organisations and the GLA has an opportunity not only to draw on their expertise in their GES, but to pledge its support for the work they do.

Outcomes & Measures

The outcomes and measures in the GES, listed as 'What we have done' and 'What we plan to do', are generic when they could be gender specific. Vague and tangentially relevant actions are listed in response to the preceding statistics and information listed under each theme. It is unclear for instance how:

- the publication of the Fuel Poverty in London report will ameliorate the lives of women living in poverty in London;
- the sponsorship of mayoral Academies will increase women's education and skill levels in London; or
- making London a "genuinely cycle-friendly city" will address the genuine and real public transport issues that women face.

Conclusion

While there are specific issues which have not been addressed by the GLA's GES (such as sexual health or trafficking and the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games) overall the most glaring deficit is the lack of detail and gender specificity in the actions listed as taken and to be taken to address gender inequality. A definition of equality and gender inequality at the beginning of the document would serve to clarify the vision of the GLA and provide a framework against which to place past accomplishments and form future goals.

Gender inequality cannot be addressed before it is defined, and perhaps this is a key issue in the content that follows.

One of the many vague and unspecific examples characteristic of the initiatives the GLA intends to undertake to address women's inequality is: "*The Mayor will develop an inclusive Sports Legacy Plan for London to make sport and physical*

¹² *Why women only?* Women's Resource Centre (2007). Available at: http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/w/whywomenonly.pdf

activity accessible to all". There is no mention of women and girls, a quantifiable goal or a timeline.

Of the 119 actions listed that the GLA has taken and plans to take to address gender inequality only 52 mention gender specifically, and of these 12 are so vague or lacking in real statistics and measures that they are irrelevant, for example:

- Under Employment and business the following are listed as actions the GLA has taken:

"The Mayor's Diversity Works for London programme, delivered by the LDA has provided practical help to businesses to harness the benefits of a diverse workforce and a diverse supplier base, to encourage them to employ a workforce that is reflective of London's population and to provide contracts to women run businesses."

"Business Link in London, which is delivered through the LDA, has delivered programmes targeted at women to encourage them to go into business and to support them to stay in business."

"The GLA group has promoted flexible working and getting more women into jobs traditionally seen as being done by men and into more senior positions."

None of the above three actions are supported by statistics or quantifiable evidence that shows how they have improved women's inequality. How many contracts have been provided to women-run businesses? How many women have opened or stayed in business as a result of the Business Link programmes? And, what change has there been as a result of the GLA's promotion of flexible working, getting more women into traditionally male jobs, and into more senior positions?

- Under Violence and safety the following is listed as an action the GLA has taken:

"The GLA has been working with MPS to address violence against women and to bring those that perpetrate it to account."

How have the GLA been working with the MPS? What initiatives have they undertaken, and what were the outcomes of this work? What change has there been in the MPS or externally as a result of this work? How have women benefitted?

Under the same section the following is listed amongst the GLA's future plans:

"The GLA will work with the MPS and other partners to increase victim confidence in reporting violence against women crimes to the police and improve the sanction detection, prosecution and conviction rates of violence against women crimes."

Again, how will this be achieved? Given that no specific goals have been set in terms of the number of initiatives to be put in place, who or how many 'other partners' are to be included, or rate of increase in sanction detection, prosecution and conviction hoped for there is no way to measure the efficacy of this GLA plan.

- Under housing and planning the following is listed as an action the GLA will take:

"The Mayor will encourage London's planners to consider the needs of women and boys and girls."

How will the Mayor encourage London's planners to consider these needs? How will the population in London know that the Mayor has followed through on this commitment?

The 12 actions use unspecified phrases like "*an appropriate proportion*" (used when referring to the number of women who will benefit from the LDA's skills support programmes) or "*more*" (when referring to increasing transport police officers) and thus do not provide clear targets to measure against. The impact of the actions taken by the GLA must be measurable otherwise there is no way of knowing if they have or will make any difference to gender equality.

The remaining 58 actions which do not mention gender specifically are generic and therefore, unless further explained in terms of their impact on women, do not belong in a GES at all. This serious lack of detail pervasive throughout the document renders the GLA's GES essentially irrelevant and impossible to implement due to the fundamental absence of means for measuring the success of this scheme.

Summary of recommendations

- Define 'Equality' and 'Gender Inequality' at the outset
- Incorporate an intersectional approach to addressing gender inequality
- Include HIV, sexual health and teenage pregnancy under health
- Include trafficking and prostitution under London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games
- Incorporate expertise from the women's voluntary and community sector in London
- Be specific, including timelines and quantifiable goals, in the actions to be taken
- Exclude generic actions taken or to be taken or detail their impact on gender inequality specifically
- Implement recommendations from WRC's Gender Equality Scheme Template for Local Public Bodies in drafting meaningful and measurable actions and goals
http://www.wrc.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2008/g/1_geslocaltemplate08.pdf