THE ROLE OF STANDARDIZATION IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

- Women empowerment is about facilitating equal opportunities and creating an environment which is politically, socially and economically fair for women to participate and reach their full potential.

- Education and empowerment are inseparable, it is hard to talk about empowerment without education

- One of the biggest challenges that African women still face is lack of access to education

- The African continent is making commendable strides in women leadership at high levels: President Ellen Johnson of Liberia, ARSO Goodwill Ambassador President Ameenah Gurib-Fakim of Mauritius, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, African Union Chairperson, Dr Eve Gadzikwa, our President-elect, various DGs of African Standards Bodies, to name a few.

- African cabinets have been increasing women representation in Parliament and many countries passing gender supportive laws

- It is at the policy implementation level that a lot still needs to be done in terms of participation both at leadership and technical level – this presentation’s focus.
HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- Women have always determined the majority of standards for their families
  - Meals & family activity times
  - General well-being of kids
- Significantly empowered at home as the kitchen was/is accepted as the woman’s place and raising kids their responsibility
- Fathers have always had to fit into pre-determined home standards – even though not acknowledged as “standards”
- The problem is that it is in the home that they were/are empowered NOT to contribute to standardization outside the household, for economic development
- On the political front, advocacy for women empowerment is not new: South African women March in 1956 against passes – they were demanding equal standards with women (and people) of other races.
GLOBAL PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action’s commitments include to:
  
  a. Ensure women’s equal access to economic resources, including land, credit science and technology, vocational training, information, communication and markets, as a means to further the advancement and empowerment of women and girls, including through the enhancement of their capacities to enjoy the benefits of equal access to these resources, inter alia, by means of international cooperation.

  a. Develop gender-sensitive multisectoral programmes and strategies to end social subordination of women and girls and to ensure their social and economic empowerment and equality

- Various ILO Conventions: Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Decent Work for Domestic workers, etc

- Various UN Women Empowerment programmes
REALITY CHECK

- Democratic as most of our countries are, women empowerment is still only in government policies with little implementation in the broader economy, especially in the private sector.
- Insufficient support and awareness programmes to get women to a level where they can participate effectively.
- Many economic activities are not accessible to women, e.g. participation in standardization.
- Insufficient support for women’s domestic “responsibilities” to allow them time and space to participate fully in economic decision-making.
- Partial consideration of women inclusion: For employment equity in South Africa legislation ensures preference of vulnerable and previously disadvantaged individuals but policies for standards development do not.
Women are the majority of the world’s farmers, yet carbon mitigation projects in agriculture and forestry are rarely designed in ways that benefit their economic and social status.

- Even as majority of farmers, it is estimated that women own only 1% of property and lack of rights to inherit or own land, which severely limits women’s engagement in larger scale cash crop production.

Women play the vital role of taking care of their families to ensure a healthy and productive workforce for economic growth.

- They are still primary caregivers (for kids, elderly and sick people) at home but are not educated on standards that can help them effectively fulfill this role – in fact their many domestic roles makes it hard for them to even participate in such empowerment programmes.
- Financial, environmental, and health crises intensify the need for care services with the care burden falling disproportionately on women and girls.

They are leading consumers in the cosmetics and food sector but are not sufficiently represented in cosmetics and food technical committees, for example.

Identification of women as being a reliable, productive labour force makes them the preferred workforce for textiles and electronic transnational corporations.

Perception of women as ‘good with money,’ including being better at paying back loans, has led them to be targeted in microfinance programmes.

Recognition of women as more efficient distributors of goods & services within the household has led to them being targeted with resources aimed at alleviating poverty, such as cash transfer programmes.

Clearly, women are involved in many aspects of the economy but are not involved in decision-making even in the sectors they are actively contributing to.
WHAT ROLE CAN STANDARDIZATION PLAY IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT?

- Ensure balance of Technical Committees not only by stakeholder group but also by gender

**South Africa:** PortiaM is a black-female owned cosmetics manufacturing SMME, which relied for a long time on external manufacturing (and high costs) for their product and after winning an SMME Award got ISO 9001 certification – which led to in-house manufacturing and enabled her to join a national TC where standards related to her products are being developed

- Include women empowerment in the criteria for approval of standards to be developed
  α in addition to environmental, economic and safety needs; social needs to include women empowerment

- Consideration of women’s limitations/capabilities in all aspects of the standards we develop – checklists to ensure accessibility by women

**Europe:** When small lightweight rotary electric lawn-mowers were first introduced, hazard data showed that women sustained serious cuts to their feet more frequently than men. Research showed that women more often pulled the mowers backwards as well as forwards (like a domestic vacuum cleaner), sometimes pulling the mowers onto their feet. The data presented compelling evidence. A less rigid blade, which would not damage feet seriously, was introduced into the European Standard for all such small mowers
WHAT ROLE CAN STANDARDIZATION PLAY IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT?

- Standards can transform previously male-dominated workplaces that have not fully considered how to integrate women in the their workforces

**SOUTH AFRICA:** A proposal from the Mining Health and Safety Council to develop standards for protective clothing that is suitable for women. The project addresses garment sizing and fit concerns and challenges that are currently faced by the manufacturing industry as traditionally overalls have been developed largely for men in the industry with very little focus on women who have now entered that workplace. Overalls currently do not cater for women’s body shapes, leading to discomfort and possible compromised protection. *SABS TC on Textiles*

- Develop standards to help facilitate implementation of government policies for women empowerment

**FRANCE:** AFNOR have developed a standard to help government implement diversity policies in the workplace.

- Develop standards that enable investment in infrastructure such as water, sanitation and electricity which to ease the time burden associated with women’s domestic tasks
  
  - Standards on rural electrification; access to clean water; decent sanitation, etc
  - Standards on birth control, to empower women to take charge – condom standards incl female condoms

- Develop and implement support programmes to empower women to the level of male counterparts for effective and fair engagement

**SOUTH AFRICA:** Other sectors run programmes aimed purely at women empowerment, e.g. “Women in Science” Awards and Bursaries, Women in Environment Conventions.
CONCLUSION

- Include Women Empowerment Initiative in ARSO Strategic Plans
  - “Women in Standardization” programmes such as Awards or Seminars or Mentorship
  - Encourage participation in ARSO internship programmes

- Education about Standardization
  - Include a special drive towards encouragement of women inclusion as a previously non-participating group

- Representation of Women in ARSO THCs
  - Encourage nomination of women by Members as experts and for leadership positions in THCs

- Checklist for standards being developed
  - To ensure that women’s needs have been considered

- Provide solutions and support to other sectors of the economy
  - Provide standardization solutions to governments and sectors that need to transform to include women – e.g. protective clothing
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