



PROPOSAL & REPORT WRITING **MANUAL**

**FOR SMALL-MEDIUM SIZED
WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS**

**A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS
FUNDED BY THE AFRICAN WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT FUND (AWDF)**

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FOREWORD

It is challenging for women's rights organisations with weaker capacity, to navigate the narrow donor landscape, secure funding and institutional support for staff salaries, office rent and general expenses, and sustain organisational development, because funders are reluctant to support these areas. Meanwhile, these are the same areas critical to organisational performance. At the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), we recognize that for women's organisations to achieve their objectives and make impact in sustainable ways, they need both institutional and programmatic support.

However, as a grant-making organisation with extensive experience in assessing proposals from various organisations across the continent, AWDF has noted with great concern the poor quality of some proposals and reports received from several women's organisations. This prompted for support for improvement in those areas: Proposal Development and Donor Reporting. Indeed as a women's fund, one of AWDF's key objectives is to build the capacity of its grantees and women's rights organisations, to enable them attract diverse resources for their work, and be able to demonstrate the impact of what they do.

Hence, this Proposal and Report Writing Manual is developed with information from a two-day skills-building workshop in Nairobi, Kenya in March 2011 organized by AWDF, for small to medium size grantees in Kenya on proposal writing, reporting and documentation. The production of this manual is the collective effort of the 22 grantees who participated in the workshop, the Facilitator Jane Kirago, Rapporteur Kathambi Kinoti, and AWDF itself. We wish to thank you all for the rich contributions you made to this manual, which now goes to serve the work of the many grantees who were not at the workshop. We hope that this manual will serve as a useful practical tool for the strengthening of the work of women's right organisations in Africa.

Our sincerest gratitude goes also to our donors, Comic Relief and MDG3 and The African Capacity Building Foundation for supporting the workshop and the production of this important manual.

Sarah Mukasa

Director of Programmes, AWDF

ABOUT THE AFRICAN WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT FUND (AWDF)

Over the past twelve years, the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) has blazed a trail for women's rights and philanthropy across the African continent. The first pan-African women's grant-maker on the continent, AWDF has established itself as an innovative organisation at the cutting edge of social justice and women's rights philanthropy in Africa.

Since the start of operations in 2001, AWDF has provided US\$21 million in grants to 1014 women's organisations in 42 African countries. AWDF's grant-making processes are uniquely designed to meet the needs of African women and include the provision of small grants¹ (\$1000-\$5000) to community-based organisations, main grants (up to \$50,000), capacity building support and a strong focus on movement building.

Members of AWDF's staff and board provide capacity-building support to grantee partners through convenings, monitoring, and evaluation visits, as well as technical assistance to numerous national, regional, and international processes. Advocacy and policy development are key areas of activity to support and embed the outcomes of our grant-making in national and international legislation, and in development processes more generally. Examples of our support to key development processes include presentations to the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women Experts Group Meeting on financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women (2007); acting as a thematic lead for the International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace & Security (co-convened by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia and President Tarja Halonen of Finland in 2009); and co-convening the first pan African assembly of the African GrantMakers Network in 2010.

1

Read more on our grant making processes at www.awdf.org

VISION & MISSION

The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) is a grant making foundation that supports local, national, and regional women's organisations working towards the empowerment of African women, and the promotion and realisation of their rights. The vision of AWDF is for women to live in a world where there is social justice, equality, and respect for women's human rights. To this end, our mission is to mobilise financial, human, and material resources to support African women and the work of the African women's movement, to advance women's rights and gender equality in Africa. We believe that if women and women's organisations are empowered with skills, information, sustainable livelihoods, opportunities to fulfill their potential, plus the capacity and space to make transformatory choices, then we will have vibrant, healthy and inclusive communities.

GRANT MAKING

AWDF provides grants in the following thematic areas:



12 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT FOR AFRICAN WOMEN HAVE RESULTED IN:

■ A grant making portfolio of over 1,014 women's organisations, networks, and coalitions in 42 African countries.

A focused, holistic and diverse grant-making portfolio which ensures that AWDF addresses the breadth and depth of women's realities. ■

■ A nuanced and flexible approach to grant-making in Africa by an African foundation that practices feminist principles, and ensures relevant and responsive grant-making to its constituencies.

Recognition of AWDF's innovation, effectiveness, and leadership as the recipient of numerous international awards. ■

■ A uniquely feminist organisation that has successfully countered the stereotypical images of African women as helpless victims, and promoted the reality of African women as active agents of change, by communicating their achievements through publications and other resources including: 'Voice, Power and Soul: Portraits of African Feminists', and 'Creating Spaces & Amplifying Voices: The First Ten Years of the African Women's Development Fund'

A leading voice in civil society with a history of successful and effective collaborations and partnerships with a diverse constituency of actors critical to advancing women's rights in Africa. ■

■ The development of good practice models for movement-building as conveners of the groundbreaking African Feminist Forum, which is regarded as one of the most influential innovations for women's rights movement building to have emerged in recent years.

Playing a leading role in the development of an African agenda for philanthropy as co-founders of the African Grant Makers Network. ■

■ Establishing an Endowment Fund for organisational sustainability.

Over the past 12 years, AWDF has provided a much-needed autonomous resource base to ensure that the needs, aspirations, and contributions of African women are recognised, supported, and valued. In partnership with our stakeholders, AWDF looks forward to more years of strategic grant-making for the advancement of women's rights in Africa, for strengthened women's leadership, for better health, education, and economic security for African women, as well as social justice in Africa.



INTRODUCTION

Funding support for women's organisations working to achieve gender equality is an important element in donor strategies for empowering women. Women's organisations often have detailed knowledge of the social and cultural barriers to gender equality and empowering women, and can recognise and address the impact of gender inequalities at local and national levels. However, most of these organisations are faced with real challenges in articulating this knowledge to donors to help them attract the necessary funding for their work. Many women's organisations grapple with communicating their impact and best practices in compelling ways to attract donor interest, and are often unaware of the link between this and resource mobilisation.

It is also a well-known fact, that funding requirements by some donors make it difficult for small women's organisations to access their funding. Requirements such as project-based approaches which are usually intended to create efficient accountability, and tracking processes, end up creating insecurity for small CSOs and women's organisations. Unfortunately, this is the reality of donor funding and women's organisations have to recreate themselves to meet these standards and fit into this system. It is important for funding organisations like AWDF to support its grantees to develop innovative and alternative ways of mobilizing resources to support their work.

As a grant-making and capacity-building foundation, one of our objectives is to strengthen the organisational capacity of our grantees to operate. Therefore, AWDF has a Capacity Building Unit which organises, among other activities, skills-building, specialised workshops, and thematic convenings for grantees to share and strengthen their skills.

In March 2011, AWDF organized a two-day skills-building workshop in Nairobi, for small to medium sizes grantee organisations operating in Kenya. The workshop sought to provide grantees with additional skills and insight into writing marketable proposals, reporting, and communicating best practices about their work to a wider constituency. The workshop was part of a series of skills-building workshops organised by AWDF to address grantees' capacity building insufficiencies, with the aim of strengthening their programmes, and demonstrating the impact of their work.

The production of this manual was inspired by the rich contributions of the twenty-six (26) participants at this workshop. These participants were mainly women leaders of small to medium size organisations operating in different parts of Kenya to promote social justice for women. We hope the manual will be used in conjunction with other tools to increase the resource base of grantee organisations through strengthened documentation and knowledge management. It is also hoped that the lessons here will be applied to increase the visibility of the grantees' work.

WHAT MAKES A WINNING PROPOSAL?

This session seeks to provide insight into components of good proposals, and how these are linked to implementing successful programmes. The funding proposal forms the basis of the relationship with a donor. It should not be hastily written, without careful thought and planning. Rather, a lot of research, reflection, and planning should go into it.

SOME BROAD ISSUES FOR REFLECTION WHEN DEVELOPING A DONOR PROPOSAL:

■ Why are you writing the proposal?

How well do you understand the donor? ■

■ Know your organisation: What are your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT)?

Demonstrate understanding of the context of your work, your objectives, and the process by which you will achieve these objectives to respond to the context. ■

Always keep in mind that the main purpose of a proposal is **PERSUASION**, not description. While you must describe the proposed project, you need to do so in a manner that convinces the donor that you deserve that money or support you are requesting. It is important to understand the different funding agencies from whom you are asking funding as they differ in interests and also the fund amounts they give.

Think about the people in the funding organisation who will read your proposal and whom you should convince. There is a decision-maker who will make the final decision on whether to fund or not. There may be a project officer to screen and make an initial recommendation to a senior officer, and a technical expert who will assess the technical competence of the proposal and write a report to the decision-maker. Therefore, your proposal must be persuasive and technically detailed.

KNOW THE FUNDER

Invest in knowing the donor. A funding proposal is a “selling” process. When you sell something, you need to know what the prospective buyers want. Funders are “buyers” and they have an agenda (their reason for existing). You need to know what this agenda is. Some of the things funders look for in project proposals are:

■ How the intervention will make an impact or difference;

If it contributes towards acquiring knowledge, understanding and information; ■

■ If it shares knowledge and adds value to the chosen interventions;

How it increases their influence in addressing what they consider the problems of the world, region, country or particular area. ■

The proposal and overall agenda need to be consistent with the funder’s interest. e.g. if you support liberal laws on abortion, you cannot send your proposal to a church-based fund. The proposal must convince the funder that your project is likely to lead to a successful intervention, one that it can be proud to claim involvement in.

IN WRITING THE PROPOSAL, YOU MUST DEMONSTRATE KNOWLEDGE OF:

1 The name, address, fax, email and title of person you should make contact with at the funding organisation. It gives a poor impression when you get these basic details wrong;

2

The mission and goals of the funder and their areas of concern interest;

3

The size of grants that the funder gives;

4

Their decision-making process and how long it takes for a decision to be made;

5

Whether there is a special format in which the request for funds needs to be presented.

PACKAGING

People identify with people! The proposal must have a human face; it should be engaging and not just a dry summary. Most funders want to see how they will be adding value by sharing what they have learned from other projects. They may want to specialise in testing certain hypotheses.

Funders want well packaged ideas. They receive very many proposals and yours must STAND out. It should present exciting and refreshing ideas. You must present it in the right format and ensure that it meets the funder's criteria. Establishing a relationship and good rapport with the donor representative helps you to understand what they expect.

KNOW YOUR ORGANISATION

You cannot hope to sell a project if you do not know and cannot present a picture of your organisation as a “good risk.” Funders are investing in development and thus they are looking for a good risk, with potential to demonstrate value for money. You need to demonstrate why you are likely to make a difference, and how you are likely to sustain the intervention.

PLAN THE PROJECT

The first step is to make a strong link between your organisational mission and strategy, and the specific project for which you are requesting funding. It is a mistake to fundraise by thinking “What can we get money for?” Rather than, “What intervention will allow us to achieve our overall mission, and how can we ensure that it is resourced?”

DEMONSTRATE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF:

- The context and how this is reflected in the organisation’s strategy;
- Specific circumstances in the context that creates the problem which your project is intervening in;
- Your objectives;
- The process you will undertake to achieve the outcomes

Funders have many demands on their resources and they want to invest them in a way that best helps in achieving their own mission. Contextualise your project in a way that shows that the problem or opportunity being addressed by your project FITS the funder’s concern - that tackling the problem is important, and that potential learning is likely to emerge.

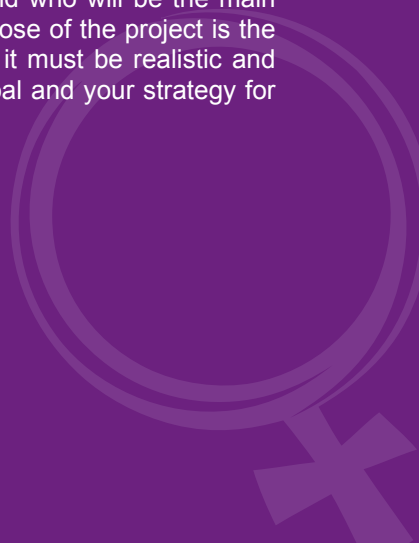
RELEVANT DETAILS ABOUT CONTEXT COULD INCLUDE:

- Country, region, area details
- Poverty information, state of the economy
- Gender equality situation
- HIV/AIDS situation.
- Country, region, area details

The proposal should not read like a thesis, but should rather provide useful information that makes interesting background for the reader, and is not overwhelming.

SET YOUR OBJECTIVES

This phase helps you to define the project clearly and provides a framework for understanding what is to be achieved. What do you want to achieve, how do you want to achieve it, and who will be the main beneficiaries? The intended achievement/purpose of the project is the factor by which the project will be judged, so it must be realistic and feasible. Objectives help you to clarify your goal and your strategy for achieving it.



GENERAL OBJECTIVE OR GOAL

- Usually it requires several actors to realise it, and your project contributes towards this end.
- It provides a benchmark against which the success of your project can be measured.
- It should be compatible with your organisation's vision.
- It is usually long-term.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES



PROCESS

The process is the step-by-step journey you will take to achieve your project purpose.

Thus you need to answer:



The more thought that goes into designing a project, the more the proposal is likely to be coherent, logical, appropriate and successful.

FORMAT

It is vital to comply with the donor's grant application format. Specific formats differ, and you should find out what format the specific donor you are applying to requires. Broadly, the proposal should have the following elements:

■ TITLE PAGE

SUMMARY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PROPOSAL
– what you hope to achieve, objectives and summary
■ of envisaged process (1 page maximum)

■ CONTENTS PAGE: Follow standard format – fit in what you have to say within the various headings.

BODY PROPOSAL: This has the detailed content and describes project purpose, goals, objectives, context, specific and relevant opportunities, and/or problems upon which your organisation will intervene. Make it clear who will directly or indirectly benefit from the intervention. Elaborate the intended process. It is important to demonstrate innovativeness.

CONCLUSION

APPENDICES: These contain technical information.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

It is advantageous to link the project to local, regional, and global development processes. For instance, demonstrate that the project contributes to the achievement of one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) or the Maputo Protocol.

Some donors ask for grantees' community contribution. This could be money, time, land, office space, and other resources that the grantee already has.

Often, organisations start by deciding activities then formulating objectives around those activities. This approach is likely to have minimal impact. It is important to be clear on the objectives first, and then let them inform the activities.

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CASE STUDY FROM GROUP EXERCISE

In order to demonstrate what they had learned, participants were divided into three groups to write a project proposal. This session was also to allow participants to apply creativity and innovativeness into a proposal design drawing from earlier insights, and with the aim of increasing resources for the programme. All the groups reflected a good understanding of the learning of the previous session, and their work contained most of the components of a good proposal. However, the following gaps, reflecting common limitations of proposals received by donors, were identified:

- Over-emphasis on activities without clear goals;
- Failure to demonstrate the link between project goals and organisational goals;
- Too many planned activities;
- Insufficient explanation of relevant national, regional, and international development goals. For instance, in a project whose goal is to educate women on the opportunities for participation in processes around the Kenya government's devolved funds, an explanation of what devolved funds are, what their goal is and how this is linked to addressing issues of women.
- Lack of clarity on the difference between goals and strategies.
- Lack of clear project time-frames.
- Insufficient background information about the organisation presenting the proposal.
- Insufficient quantification of results.
- Inadequate or no information about project sustainability.
- Insufficient description of target group.
- Insufficient understanding of the difference between the problem statement and the justification. The justification should be about why the project is necessary and why the applying organisation is the best placed to address the problem as they propose to do so.

TIPS ON GOOD REPORTING

AWDF’s work over the years with grantees has revealed that some grantees are not telling their stories as they should and that there is a lot more happening in organisations in the field and communities, than are being communicated to the wider public. Perhaps grantees are not adequately identifying where the stories are, and where their work is really making a difference, or do not have the capacity to communicate these stories. As women’s rights organisations, there is therefore the need to sit back and reflect on the stories behind the projects, and strategise around communicating these to different stakeholders.

Resources for women’s rights work are dwindling, and the resource mobilisation architecture is tough to navigate. The stiff competition for these dwindling resources behooves women’s rights organisations to step into the limelight and display the exceptional work that they are doing.

Reports are prepared for different stakeholders: Donors, beneficiaries, governments, and the organisation itself. The content of a report depends on its intended audience. The following were listed as the different kinds of reports:

NARRATIVE PROGRESS REPORTS	INTERIM AND FINAL REPORTS
FINANCIAL REPORTS	ACTIVITY/PROCESS REPORTS
ANNUAL REPORTS	MONTHLY REPORTS
MONITORING AND EVALUATION REPORTS	

The type of report determines its contents. Financial reports are about accounting for how money was spent, against what was planned in the budget. Progress reports, are regular reports that describe what activities were carried out, the output and outcomes. They include planned activities for the month or quarter. Activity reports are process reports that help an organisation track its outputs. The emphasis of the final report is outcomes, impact where applicable, challenges and lessons learned in implementing the project.

It is important to keep the donor well-informed throughout the project. Do not wait for the end of the project to report on critical challenges or impediments. The final report can discuss the way forward. It is important to state your plans and show justifications for why the donor should invest more in your organisation. Remember to include the stories in narrative form, videos, or pictures. This helps donors understand what their impact is, and also account to their own donors. Attachments can include pictures of activities, IEC materials and audited financial reports.

TO BE SUCCESSFUL, A REPORT WHICH MAKES RECOMMENDATIONS MUST ENSURE THAT THE PERSONS FOR WHOM THE REPORT IS INTENDED ARE ABLE TO:

- Read it without unnecessary frustrations.
- Understand everything in it without excessive effort.
- Accept the facts, findings, conclusions and recommendations fluidly.
- Decide to take the action recommended.

Achieving this demands more of you than merely presenting relevant facts accurately. It also demands that you communicate in a way that is both *acceptable* and *intelligible* to the reader. Careful choice of words can enable you to convey many subtleties of meaning. Check that everything you write is factually accurate. The facts should be capable of being verified. Moreover, arguments should be soundly based and your reasoning should be logical. You should not write anything that will misinform, mislead, or unfairly persuade your readers.

A report should be objective. It should not be an essay reflecting personal emotions and opinions. Look at all sides of a problem with an open mind before stating your conclusions. Making it clear that you have an open mind when writing your report will, in most cases, make your conclusions and recommendations more acceptable to your readers.

The emphasis, therefore, should be on the factual material presented and the conclusions drawn, rather than on any personal beliefs, biases or prejudices.

Aim to keep your report concise. In doing this, do not mistake brevity for conciseness. A report may be brief because it omits important information. A concise report, on the other hand, is short but still contains all the essential details. To ensure you do not include material which can safely be left out, you should not ask: 'Can this information be included?' Rather, you should ask: 'Is it *necessary* for this information to be included?'

Your report should be clear and consistent. The best way to achieve clarity in your writing is to allow some time to elapse between the first draft and its revision. Try to leave it over the weekend, or at least overnight. If you are really under pressure and this is simply not possible, at least leave it over a lunch or coffee break. It is essential to have a period of time, no matter how short, when you can think of other things. In this way, when you come back to the report, you can look at it with a degree of objectivity.

Aim for simplicity. Usually, if your writing is selective, accurate, objective, concise, clear and consistent, it will also be as simple as it can be.

You should keep your readers firmly in mind and keep asking yourself whether or not they will be able to follow the logic of your presentation. Avoid pointless words and phrases like *basically*, *actually*, *undoubtedly*, *each and every one* and *during the course of our investigation* – which keep cropping up in reports and yet add nothing to the message and can often be removed without changing the meaning or the tone of the statement. Try leaving them out of your writing. You will find your sentences survive, succeed and may even flourish without them.

TIPS ON COMPLYING WITH AWDF REPORTING GUIDELINES

THESE ARE LESSONS GARNERED FROM REVIEWING GRANTEE REPORTS OVER THE YEARS AT AWDF, AND WE SHARE THEM WITH YOU AS TIPS FOR WRITING REPORTS:

- View the report as a fundraising tool: The report helps the donor decide whether or not to fund the organisation again.
- Do not be afraid to speak about challenges.
■ A challenge is always an opportunity.
- Clearly link activities with outcomes.
- Do not underestimate exceptional successes.
- Include lessons learned; donors want to invest where there is knowledge production.
- Demonstrating impact: A short-term project will not have immediate impact, so it is alright to demonstrate that it is contributing towards a goal, and give examples.
- Collect verbatim quotes from community members where possible.
■ These are useful to demonstrate shifts in attitudes or behaviour.

CONCLUSIONS FROM TIPS ON REPORT WRITING.

MAIN QUESTION: IT IS POSSIBLE TO CHANGE ACTIVITIES AFTER MONEY HAS ALREADY BEEN DISBURSED?

RESPONSES:

1. Donors can accept this provided that there was prior discussion about why there is a need to for changes in activities.
2. Most donors would accommodate a discussion on a delay in reporting. It is necessary to write beforehand explaining the circumstances why activity or a report has been delayed. Alternatively, grantees can ask for a no-cost extension on a particular project.
3. Keep the donor informed about what is going on within the organisation by sharing your annual report. Let them also know about work being carried out that they have not funded. This gives the donor a good understanding of the organisation and when they are approached for funding, they have a good idea of the quality and impact of your organisation's work.
4. Send the report to the right person within the donor organisation.
5. It is important to have a file for each donor in which you file all communication between your organisation and the donor.
6. Do not insert activity/process (e.g. workshop) reports into the final report. Final reports should be a synthesis that discusses the output and effects of the intervention. Process/activity reports should be added as appendixes.

BEST PRACTICES IN GENDER EQUALITY WORK: THE GROOTS EXPERIENCE

GROOTS is passionate about finding solutions for women living in poor communities and has brought to the surface the diverse and common experiences of women. It believes in building movements of people and

organisations. Some of these are self-help groups that get donor, NGO, or government support while others generate their own income through member contributions, or income-generating activities. GROOTS brings all these diverse groups of people together for two reasons:

1. The sum effect of the resources invested in disparate interventions is limited. If individuals and groups can band together to form a collective voice, then they can have a significant impact on legislative and policy reform.
2. To eliminate duplication of efforts and build teamwork towards a mutually agreed destination.

GROOTS' basis of movement-building work is to enable women, and communities to influence governance structures and systems. In 2009 they produced a documentary to surface the leadership of the women they work with and track their gains over the 15 years that the organisation has been in existence. This process of thorough documentation helped women reflect on 15 years of consistent development work, and helped them realize the magnitude of what they had achieved. Some women who had started out as home-based carers were now community leaders and even chiefs. They had gained recognition in the community and even advised the government on how to strengthen health care policies for people living with HIV/AIDS, and on land policies that ensured that women's rights are respected. In 2006, GROOTS decided that the women they work with should never meet under trees, borrow church halls, or other community spaces. They realized the power of a physical space where women could meet, and could interact with authority figures on their own terms. They obtained land from the government, and with the support of AWDF, constructed functional meeting places.

CONCLUSION

- The GROOTS model encourages women to visualize themselves differently, as having the ability to change their status quo. The home-based careers have developed from providing welfare to challenging norms that restrict women's rights.
- GROOTS has demonstrated that movement building works, when power is built from the bottom up, and this is a model other women's rights organisations should replicate.

ANNEX

PARTICIPANTS' LIST FOR SKILLS BUILDING TRAINING ON REPORT & PROPOSAL WRITING FOR SMALL & MEDIUM SIZE AWDF GRANTEES. NAIROBI, KENYA MARCH 2011

	NAME OF PARTICIPANTS	NAME OF ORGANISATION	CONTACT DETAILS
1	Angelina Okweya Nandwa Project Director	Single Mothers Association of Kenya (SMAK)	P.O. BOX 75603 00200 NAIROBI, KENYA angelina30ke@yahoo.com 0722 84 58 73 OR 020 674174
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