

Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Kenya

The Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya was established in 1985. In 1992 a secretariat was created and ever since has been working toward the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Gender-based violence is one significant manifestation of existing discrimination and consequently is a major focus of FIDA's work.

FIDA Kenya works to empower women through provision of legal aid services. Through this programme, women receive legal advice and information and where necessary legal representation. For those who are able and interested, training on self-representation is undertaken.

At the community level, FIDA Kenya strengthens capacity of local institutions. Key sectors where gender inequities are likely to be advanced are the main focus, such as the local chiefs, the police force, heads of schools, medical and health institutions. A strong monitoring of violations by these groups strengthens the sustainability potential for our interventions by ensuring that the actors take responsibility to reduce GBV.

Lobbying with policymakers and legislatures with a view to reforming the legal and policy terrain is another area of focus. Quite apart from being informed by the legal clientele and the community-based monitors on the status of violations, FIDA Kenya seeks to monitor government compliance with international human rights instruments with a view to ensure they are domesticated so as to benefit Kenyan women and men.

Objectives

1. To strengthen mechanisms redressing sexual and gender-based violence by police and chiefs
2. To conduct policy advocacy and grassroots sensitization to enhance women's ability to access, protect and promote their rights.
3. To strengthen efforts to increase the participation of women in entrenching a constitutional order that promotes the rights of women.
4. To increase awareness and understanding of gender issues and women rights with a view to influencing positive behaviour change in schools, health institutions, religious institutions and local leadership organs.

Programme Description

Legal Services. FIDA offers legal counseling and emotional support for the clients who visit our clinics and legal suits are filed in court to seek protection from the batterer. The majority of cases are resulting from GBV.

Police Training Curriculum. In recognizing the biased and patriarchal nature of our society, efforts to create awareness on women's human rights have been strengthened. The local chiefs and police force are regularly receiving training on how to handle gender-based crimes. FIDA Kenya's collaboration with the police started in 1994 and has culminated in the production of a curriculum to train police recruits on handling gender-based crimes. The integration of FIDA training in the police training school is a great milestone.

Lobbying and Advocacy. As FIDA Kenya was established by lawyers, the absence of sufficient laws to handle gender-based violence preoccupies the rights programme. Interaction with policymakers and legislators with a view to influence gender sensitive laws and policies is continuously nurtured. The office of the Attorney General in preparing the Family Protection (Domestic Violence) Bill sought FIDA Kenya's technical expertise. In addition, the lobbying of parliamentarians is a main focus of our work. The current constitutional conference is an opportune time for Kenyan women to shape the framework for recognition of women's rights, gender based violence. Once the legal status of women is uplifted and laws that promote and ensure respect for human rights and community are informed about the centrality of respect for women's human rights, we may see a transformation and a reduction on the incidences of gender based violence.

Notable Innovation

Working with police and legislators to promote GBV prevention

FIDA has successfully raised the profile of GBV within the criminal justice and legislative systems.

Their long-term approach emphasizes working with and through the system to affect change.

Lessons learned from the processes include the following.

- Gender sensitive policy documents can empower women to seek justice.
- Legislators and the police, if trained and engaged on an ongoing basis, can be powerful allies and a sustainable pro-woman mechanism for GBV prevention.
- Law reform and policy analysis can be a powerful awareness raising mechanism as well as catalyze positive long-term changes for women.
- The local chiefs and police are very useful allies as they shape opinion and will gradually lead the fight against GBV.
- To eradicate GBV there is a need for a partnership between the community and the institutions that support them.
- Empowering members of parliament to use the language of rights can affect resource allocation, policies, laws and influence public opinion.
- Local institutions are important service providers to women. Local chiefs (traditional leaders) and police are very useful allies as they shape public opinion and can spearhead changes.
- When working with the police, try not only to influence individuals within them but help establish women-friendly policy and procedures that will remain long after they are gone.