



## About TrustAfrica

TrustAfrica is an independent foundation that strives to secure the conditions for democracy and equitable development throughout the continent.

Led by Africans, we convene dialogues, catalyze ideas, and provide grants and technical assistance to organizations working to advance these goals.

Our programs focus on:

- Democracy & Civil Society
- Equitable Development
- African Philanthropy

We also award competitive research grants through our:

- Investment Climate & Business Environment
- Research Fund

## HEADQUARTERS

TrustAfrica  
Lot 87, Sacré Coeur 3  
Pyrotechnie x VDN  
BP 45435  
Dakar-Fann, Senegal

**T** +221 33 869 46 86

**F** +221 33 824 15 67

**E** [info@trustafrica.org](mailto:info@trustafrica.org)

**W** [www.trustafrica.org](http://www.trustafrica.org)



Elijah Njoroge Njenga / International Institute of Rural Reconstruction

## Enhancing Women's Dignity

**With support from the Netherlands, TrustAfrica is working to curb gender violence and expand women's political participation.**

When Rwandans went to the polls in 2008 to elect a national legislature, they did something no nation on earth had ever done: award more than half the seats to women. Female candidates won 56 percent of the seats in Kigali that September—at a time when women held just 18 percent of all parliamentary seats worldwide. “The women of Rwanda, as tradition and culture has put, they have always been in the backyard,” says Connie Bwiza Sekamana, who was first elected in 2002. “Now they are coming to the limelight and they can express themselves.”

Rwanda, however, remains the exception to a dispiriting rule. In much of the world, Africa included, girls and women are far more likely to encounter discrimination and violence than to find meaningful opportunities for political participation. The United Nations General Assembly sought to turn this tide in 2000 when it adopted the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, a set of eight targets for curtailing many forms of suffering and injustice by 2015. Goal 3, listed just after eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and achieving universal primary education, calls on member states to promote gender equality and empower women.

Intent on advancing this goal, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up a special fund in 2008 to support activities that improve rights and opportunities for women and girls in developing nations. After reviewing proposals from 454 projects worldwide, the ministry awarded grants to 45 applicants—among them TrustAfrica. The winning projects take various approaches to improving gender equality and empower women, such as securing property and inheritance rights for women, promoting employment and equal opportunities on the labor market, increasing women's participation in politics and public administration, and halting violence against women. ►



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*And many individuals like you*

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## Strategies

TrustAfrica's MDG3 Project, entitled Enhancing Women's Dignity, has two objectives. The first is to reduce violence against women in all its many forms. These include physical violence (whether at home, in the workplace, or in the context of armed conflict), sexual violence (including coerced sex), emotional violence (such as systematic humiliation or threats), economic violence (like restricting access to financial resources), and social violence (as expressed in patriarchal structures and norms that infringe on women's social and civil rights). Such injustices, while abhorrent in their own right, also compound the effects of poverty, disease, war, natural disasters, and environmental degradation.

The project's second objective is to increase women's political participation. While many official declarations recognize women's right to full and equal participation in public decision making, the reality, evidenced by statistical data, is that women continue to be underrepresented. No government can claim to be truly democratic, or achieve equitable and accountable governance, until the right of women to equal representation in decision making is both guaranteed and fulfilled. The MDG3 Project therefore seeks to strengthen the role of women in governance and to promote gender-based accountability among state institutions, political parties, and social movements.

## Activities

The MDG3 Project, whose pilot phase runs from July 2009 to June 2011, is now operational in seven Francophone nations: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Niger, and Senegal. TrustAfrica and its partners are taking steps to:

- Compile a database of civil society organizations working to end violence against women and expand women's political participation in these seven countries;
- Convene training and agenda-setting workshops for civil society organizations working on either of these objectives in the target countries;
- Strengthen advocacy by organizing and sponsoring campaigns around issues of violence against women;
- Provide grants, seed funding, and technical advice to organizations working to end violence against women and increase women's political participation;
- Develop mentoring schemes, internships, and other networking activities that enable promising young women to learn from experienced female leaders;
- Document best practices concerning each objective in the seven countries; and
- Document and publish the results achieved during the pilot phase.

These efforts alone will not end the violence and exclusion perpetrated against women and girls. But they can go a long way in securing the conditions for a more equitable future—and perhaps hasten the day when these seven countries join Rwanda in electing a fair share of women to national office.

To learn more, visit [www.trustafrica.org/mdg3](http://www.trustafrica.org/mdg3) or write to [mdg3@trustafrica.org](mailto:mdg3@trustafrica.org). ■