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Gender Equality in SAI Seychelles

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Introduction

Gender equality is both a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of effective, inclusive governance. Internationally, it has been recognized through frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) as a global commitment to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” At national level, for small states like SAI Seychelles the Supreme Audit Institution responsible for public sector accountability integrating a gender lens into its mandate offers a powerful opportunity to assess whether government policies and public funds are advancing equality in practice, not just on paper.

In Seychelles, the constitutional guarantee of equal protection under the law, the adoption of a national gender policy and subsequent gender action plans, as well as legislation such as the Domestic Violence Act 2020 reflect a firm legal and policy commitment to gender equality. Nonetheless, like many jurisdictions, Seychelles faces persistent challenges in translating frameworks into equitable outcomes. In this context, SAI Seychelles is uniquely positioned to support accountability, transparency and fairness by auditing not only financial or compliance aspects, but also by incorporating gender-responsive analyses into its audits, reviewing whether public programmes and budgets deliver equally and effectively for women and men.

This report examines gender equality in SAI Seychelles across several dimensions: the national and institutional context; theoretical foundations and international practices; relevant policies and laws; internal measures that the SAI has adopted; and finally practical or hypothetical case studies illustrating how a gender lens might transform audit work. The aim is to highlight both the potential and the gaps and to propose a path toward embedding gender equality more systematically, both within SAI Seychelles and across public sector oversight.

2. Gender Equality and SAI Seychelles

Seychelles has a relatively strong formal framework for gender equality. The Constitution guarantees equal protection of the law and prohibits discrimination, including on the basis of sex, and allows for affirmative measures to benefit disadvantaged groups. The country has adopted a National Gender Policy (2016) and a National Gender Plan of Action intended to mainstream gender across all sectors and institutions. In recent years, legislation has been modernised, including the Domestic Violence Act 2020, which prohibits physical, sexual, emotional, economic and psychological abuse in the domestic sphere and sets out protection mechanisms for victims.

Seychelles is a party to key international human-rights instruments relevant to gender equality, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol. National reviews under the Beijing Platform for Action highlight progress in women's education and labour-force participation, but also persistent challenges such as gender-based violence, wage gaps and under-representation of women in some decision-making spaces.

Within this national context, the Supreme Audit Institution (SAI Seychelles) – the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) – has a constitutional and statutory mandate to audit the use of public funds and support accountability to the National Assembly. The OAG employs a relatively small, professional workforce and is part of the AFROSAI-E regional organisation, which has explicitly committed to helping SAIs become gender-responsive and to integrating gender issues into audit work.

Publicly available information on SAI Seychelles' internal gender-specific policies is limited. However, the institution's participation in AFROSAI-E activities and its visible recognition of events such as International Women's Day and Men's Day within its staff activities provide an entry point for further institutionalisation of gender equality as a cross-cutting value in both internal management and audit practice.

3.Relevant Policies, Laws and Regulations

3.1 National framework

Key elements of Seychelles' national framework that shape the promotion of gender equity include:

- **Constitution of the Republic of Seychelles** – Article 27 guarantees equal protection of the law and prohibits discrimination on multiple grounds, including sex; it also explicitly allows affirmative measures to improve the conditions of disadvantaged groups.
- **National Gender Policy (2016) and National Gender Plan of Action (2019)** – establish gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting obligation and call on all public institutions to integrate gender considerations into policies, programmes, data systems and monitoring frameworks.
- **Domestic Violence Act 2020** – modernises protection against domestic violence, broadens the definition of abuse and introduces stronger remedies. It underpins government programmes to combat gender-based violence.
- **Employment and labour legislation** – Seychelles' employment laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender and provide protections for pregnant workers and working mothers, although some assessments note that equal remuneration for work of equal value is not yet fully mandated in law.
- **National strategies on gender-based violence and women's empowerment** – including action plans on GBV and proposals for gender-empowerment measures such as minimum quotas for women in elective and appointive positions.

3.2 International and regional commitments

Seychelles has acceded to CEDAW and its Optional Protocol, as well as other core human-rights treaties. The country is committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including SDG 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

Regionally, SAI Seychelles is a member of AFROSAI-E, whose Gender Policy and subsequent initiatives seek to build SAIs' capacity to be gender-responsive and to conduct audits that promote gender equality.

3.3 Implications for SAI Seychelles

Taken together, these frameworks:

- create a mandate for SAI Seychelles to assess whether public resources are used in a way that advances gender equality;
- justify integrating gender perspectives into performance audits of sectors such as welfare assistance, health, education, employment, justice and the blue economy; and
- support the development of internal policies within SAI Seychelles on equal opportunity, prevention of harassment, and gender-sensitive HR and leadership development, in line with broader national and regional expectations.

4. Internal Measures of SAI Seychelles

Public sources do not yet provide a comprehensive picture of formal gender-equality policies inside SAI Seychelles. However, several elements are visible and can be built upon:

1. Staff development and HR initiatives

The Office of the Auditor General has recurring HR training, staff development activities and recognition events. These activities provide an existing platform for integrating gender-equality content (for example, sessions on unconscious bias, respectful workplace practices, and inclusive leadership).

2. Recognition of gender-related staff events

The institution visibly marks both Women's Day and Men's Day as well as other social and wellbeing events. Team building activities are also done which includes all staff. This indicates a culture where gender identity and staff wellbeing are acknowledged and can be leveraged to promote more explicit conversations about equality, respect and shared responsibility.

3. Engagement in regional SAI networks

SAI Seychelles participates actively in AFROSAI-E governance meetings hosted in the region and has hosted the 21st Governing Board Meeting and strategic reviews of AFROSAI-E from 19th -21st May 2025. The AFROSAI-E's recent strategy explicitly includes the development and implementation of gender, diversity and inclusion policies in member SAIs. This creates opportunities for SAI Seychelles to access guidance, tools and training on gender-responsive organisation and auditing.

4. Emerging or recommended internal measures

Building on the above, and on global good practice, SAI Seychelles can either consolidate or consider introducing measures such as:

- a simple gender-equality and inclusion policy for staff (recruitment, promotion, training, flexible work, anti-harassment);
- systematic gender-disaggregated HR data (by grade, division, contract type, training participation);

- designating a gender focal point or small working group to coordinate internal initiatives; and
- integrating gender-equality content into induction and continuous professional development, including for audit managers and team leaders.

5. Case Study / Practical Experience

5.1 Background

In 2014, SAI Seychelles issued a performance audit report on the provision of welfare assistance by the Agency for Social Protection (ASP), assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of welfare programmes in reaching intended beneficiaries. At the time, the audit focused primarily on eligibility criteria, administrative processes, and financial controls.

5.2 Applying a gender lens

A retrospective gender-sensitive reading of such an audit illustrates both progress and remaining challenges:

- National gender statistics indicate that a significant share of households in Seychelles are headed by women, and that women are often over-represented among low-income and single-parent households.
- Many welfare programmes explicitly or implicitly target these vulnerable groups, but programme documentation and monitoring tools may not always systematically capture sex-disaggregated data on beneficiaries, types of assistance received, or outcomes.

In this context, a gender-responsive version of the welfare-assistance audit would examine questions such as:

- Are women and men accessing welfare schemes at comparable rates, after adjusting for need (for example, among unemployed, single parents, or persons with disabilities)?
- Are there differences in the types or amounts of benefits received by women-headed versus men-headed households?

- How do administrative requirements (documentation, office opening hours, complaint mechanisms) impact women's ability to apply, particularly those with unpaid care responsibilities?

5.3 Lessons for SAI Seychelles

This case illustrates several important lessons:

1. **Adding value through gender-sensitive analysis**

Without changing the core objectives of the audit (effectiveness and efficiency of welfare spending), integrating simple gender-disaggregated data and analysis could significantly enhance insights about who benefits from public funds and whether programmes are equitable.

2. **Data and capacity constraints**

Limitations in sex-disaggregated data on beneficiaries and outcomes remain a barrier. SAI Seychelles can use audit recommendations to encourage ministries and agencies to collect and report such data systematically, in line with national and SDG reporting needs.

3. **Internal learning opportunity**

Internally, this case can be used as a learning exercise: audit teams could revisit a completed performance audit and “re-work” parts of it with a gender lens, drawing on emerging guidance from AFROSAI-E, IDI and UN-Women on gender audits and gender-responsive PFM.

4. **Stepping stone to dedicated gender audits**

Once teams are comfortable applying a gender lens in mainstream audits, SAI Seychelles would be better positioned to undertake dedicated audits of gender-equality policies, such as the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act, gender mainstreaming in the blue economy sector, or progress towards SDG 5 targets.

6. Conclusion

Gender equality should not be viewed as a peripheral or optional issue; rather, it is central to public-sector accountability, justice, and sustainable development. For SAI Seychelles, the existing national legal and policy framework — from constitutional guarantees to national gender strategies and laws — offers a solid mandate to embed gender considerations into audit work. At the same time, global trends show that supreme audit institutions (SAIs) increasingly embrace gender-responsive auditing and institutional gender-equality policies.

Bringing a gender lens into auditing can reveal whether public programmes, budgets and policies truly benefit all citizens — or whether unintended gender disparities persist. Internally, adopting inclusive HR practices, collecting gender-disaggregated staff data, and establishing a gender focal point or working group could help SAI Seychelles lead by example. Externally, performance audits of welfare programmes, social protection, service delivery, and even compliance with gender-equality legislation can provide powerful insights, recommendations and accountability.

Ultimately, institutionalising gender equality within SAI Seychelles is not just about meeting international or national commitments it is about fulfilling the deeper mission of public audit: ensuring equity, transparency, and the fair use of public resources for all. With deliberate effort, capacity building and commitment, SAI Seychelles can play a pivotal role in advancing gender equality across the public sector, contributing meaningfully to SDG 5, and strengthening trust in government institutions.

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