

Global Resources and Opportunities for Women to Thrive (GROWTH) Act

The GROWTH Act is groundbreaking legislation that proposes important changes to U.S. international assistance and trade programs to promote economic opportunities for women living in poverty worldwide.

This Act was introduced by Representative Nita Lowey (D-NY) to the U.S. House of Representatives in July 2006.

What will the Act do?

The GROWTH Act will establish the GROWTH Fund which will be available to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to integrate gender into existing economic opportunity programs which will focus on increasing:

- enterprise owned by women
- property rights for women
- women's access to financial services
- leadership among women in implementing indigenous nongovernmental organizations, community-based organizations, and regulated financial intermediaries
- benefits and conditions of women's employment
- women's ability to benefit from global trade

The Act will also encourage all agencies and contractors who implement U.S. assistance programs to partner with local civil society and community organizations that work on women's empowerment in developing nations.

Why support this bill?

This is the first piece of legislation that comprehensively looks at the many ways women contribute to their economies and acquire economic and financial security in developing countries.

Women, especially those in developing countries, are the first to feel the impact of local

environmental degradation because they are the ones that primarily grow crops, work as farmers, and are the main collectors of firewood and water to provide for their family and the larger community. Despite their contributions, women are still discriminated against economic opportunities and land ownership.

Increasing women's economic security is one of the surest ways to alleviate poverty. Poverty and environmental issues are inextricably linked. The largest population increase and the most fragile environmental conditions are usually found in poor countries, which typically have limited financial means and least adequate political and managerial resources to address these challenges.

Due to the fact that women make up 70 percent of the world's 1.3 billion poor people, and it is women who manage the household expenditures with regard to food, education, and healthcare for families, programs that focus on women are central to poverty and environmental alleviation efforts. If passed, the GROWTH Act will increase economic opportunities to women.

What can you do?

1. Call or write a letter to your Representative to support and co-sponsor the Bill.
2. Write a letter to your editor to spread the word about the act to gain more support.
3. Host an event that promotes awareness about the importance of the GROWTH Act and how they could support it. Email population@nwf.org for assistance on hosting an event.
4. Contact population@nwf.org for an activist tool-kit to get started and learn more about the GROWTH Act.

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

Anyone may draft a bill; however, only members of Congress can introduce legislation, and by doing so become the sponsor(s). There are four basic types of legislation: bills, joint resolutions, concurrent resolutions, and simple resolutions. The official legislative process begins when a bill or resolution is numbered - H.R. signifies a House bill and S. a Senate bill - referred to a committee and printed by the Government Printing Office.

Step 1. Referral to Committee:

- With few exceptions, bills are referred to standing committees in the House or Senate according to carefully delineated rules of procedure.

Step 2. Committee Action:

- When a bill reaches a committee it is placed on the committee's calendar. A bill can be referred to a subcommittee or considered by the committee as a whole. It is at this point that a bill is examined carefully and its chances for passage are determined. If the committee does not act on a bill, it is the equivalent of killing it.

Step 3. Subcommittee Review:

- Often, bills are referred to a subcommittee for study and hearings. Hearings provide the opportunity to put on the record the views of the executive branch, experts, other public officials, supporters and opponents of the legislation. Testimony can be given in person or submitted as a written statement.

Step 4. Mark Up:

- When the hearings are completed, the subcommittee may meet to "mark up" the bill, that is, make changes and amendments prior to recommending the bill to the full committee. If a subcommittee votes not to report legislation to the full committee, the bill dies.

Step 5. Committee Action to Report A Bill:

- After receiving a subcommittee's report on a bill, the full committee can conduct further study and hearings, or it can vote on the subcommittee's recommendations and any proposed amendments. The full committee then votes on its recommendation to the House or Senate. This procedure is called "ordering a bill reported."

Step 6. Publication of a Written Report:

- After a committee votes to have a bill reported, the committee chairman instructs staff to prepare a written report on the bill. This report describes the intent and scope of the legislation, impact on existing laws and programs, position of the executive branch, and views of dissenting members of the committee.

Step 7. Scheduling Floor Action:

- After a bill is reported back to the chamber where it originated, it is placed in chronological order on the calendar. In the House there are several different legislative calendars, and the Speaker and

majority leader largely determine if, when, and in what order bills come up. In the Senate there is only one legislative calendar.

Step 8. Debate:

- When a bill reaches the floor of the House or Senate, there are rules or procedures governing the debate on legislation. These rules determine the conditions and amount of time allocated for general debate.

Step 9. Voting:

- After the debate and the approval of any amendments, the bill is passed or defeated by the members voting.

Step 10. Referral to Other Chamber:

- When a bill is passed by the House or the Senate it is referred to the other chamber where it usually follows the same route through committee and floor action. This chamber may approve the bill as received, reject it, ignore it, or change it.

Step 11. Conference Committee Action:

- If only minor changes are made to a bill by the other chamber, it is common for the legislation to go back to the first chamber for concurrence. However, when the actions of the other chamber significantly alter the bill, a conference committee is formed to reconcile the differences between the House and Senate versions. If the conferees are unable to reach agreement, the legislation dies. If agreement is reached, a conference report is prepared describing the committee members' recommendations for changes. Both the House and the Senate must approve of the conference report.

Step 12. Final Actions:

- After a bill has been approved by both the House and Senate in identical form, it is sent to the President. If the President approves of the legislation he signs it and it becomes law. Or, the President can take no action for ten days, while Congress is in session, and it automatically becomes law. If the President opposes the bill he can veto it; or, if he takes no action after the Congress has adjourned its second session, it is a "pocket veto" and the legislation dies.

Step 13. Overriding a Veto:

- If the President vetoes a bill, Congress may attempt to "override the veto." This requires a two-thirds roll call vote of the members who are present in sufficient numbers for a quorum.

From *The Legislative Process*, <http://congress.nw.dc.us/c-span/process.html>



How to Write a Letter to the Editor

The philosophy behind your newspaper's letters-to-the-editor page can differ dramatically. The key variable is size of the paper.

Some editors of the letters page see their page as a community bulletin board on which all sorts of opinions ought to be posted. You might see a letter from a homeowner complaining about a recent county commission vote, even if the paper never covered it, for example. This wide-open policy typically is found at smaller papers, where they might be struggling to fill the space they've allotted for letters.

More common is the case of the mid-size to large suburban and urban daily newspaper, where dozens to hundreds of letters come in each day. For the editors of these larger papers, relevance is the key consideration. They want to print feedback/criticism/praise for stories and opinion columns that have appeared in their paper quite recently.

When you have evaluated the newspaper you are writing for and have an idea of its circulation, you should begin to outline your topic. First and foremost, know what you're writing about. Don't criticize a newspaper's overall coverage of an issue unless you have truly read every inch of coverage. If you're going to use the media, you must first be a smart, consistent consumer of its products.

Keeping this in mind, it is best to focus your piece on a particular story. Always quote the headline and date in your first or second sentence, i.e. "Dear Editor: Your most recent coverage of the takings/property rights issue [Property owners up in arms/April 11] was obviously an earnest attempt at covering the bases. However, some important facts were lost in the process...."

Do not feign outrage unless you have a darn good reason to be outraged. The phrase "We are outraged by....." is definitely one of the most overworked cliches in the literature. By all means, however, you should clearly highlight the conflict involved and don't mince words. If you need to attack someone, stick to the facts and keep it more or less dignified. Keep in mind that a tone of restrained indignation is often more effective than strident "outrage."

If possible, fax your letter or column to the editorial page. It gets there quicker, and 70 percent of editors say they prefer faxes. You must sign your letter and include a daytime telephone number. It's a rare newspaper that accepts form letters or unsigned letters to the editor. If you have more than one paper to work on, send each of them a different letter.

If you haven't seen your letter within a few days, call the editorial office to inquire, politely, what happened. The answers you get will help you the next time you write. Remember that no newspaper is obligated to print your letter, but newspaper editors consider themselves obligated to fairly and accurately present all sides of the issues. Use this ethic to your advantage.

Quick Tips

- Keep it brief – many papers have guidelines for the length of a letter to the editor, but if they don't, 3-4 paragraphs is a good rule with no more than 200-250 words total.
- In the first paragraph state your purpose for writing but if responding to an article don't waste space repeating incorrect information.
- In the second and optional third paragraphs reinforce your message with succinct details. Make your issue relevant to the reader.
- In the final paragraph restate your message in a catchy, memorable way.
- Proofread carefully!
- Sign your full name, address, and daytime phone number.
- If possible, find out the name and address of the person who handles letters for the paper and fax or email it directly to them.

A Sample Letter to the Editor

I am writing to stress the importance of the newly introduced Global Resources and Opportunities for Women to Thrive (GROWTH) Act. Supporting this Act will not only empower and improve the financial situation of women living in poverty worldwide but will also help improve environmental conditions in areas where extreme poverty is pervasive.

Poverty and the environment are inextricably linked. Due to the fact that 70 percent of the world's poor are women, poverty and women's issues are linked as well. Therefore, economic empowerment for women and girls are essential in alleviating poverty and improving environmental conditions.

Women, especially those in developing countries, are the first to feel the impact of local environmental degradation because they are the ones that primarily grow crops, work as farmers, and are the main collectors of firewood and water to provide for their family and the larger community. Despite their contributions, women are still discriminated against economic opportunities and land ownership. If passed, the GROWTH Act will make sure that US international development incentives include women to break the cycle of poverty, improving environmental conditions.

Sincerely,

Name

Address