

Gender Policy



AID ORGANIZATION

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1. Background

1.1 Discrimination against women, in some form or other, in this or that field, is present in the world over even today. Women are comparatively at a disadvantageous position everywhere, variation is only in degrees; in some countries the situation is very adverse, in others it is less. In cognizance to such situation and to eliminate such discrimination against women, the historic Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was held in 1979. The resolutions were adopted by all states and they committed to safeguard women's rights and entitlements and ensure that they enjoy their rights equally in economic, social, cultural, civil and political spheres.

1.2 Two of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG) particularly relate to women. One pertains to promoting gender equality and empowering women and the other to improving maternal health. Particular emphasis has been laid on elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education and to reduce maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters Aid Organization being in Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC and in Operational Relationships with UNESCO considers it imperative to work towards achievement of Millennium Development Goals.

2. COMMUNITY HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (AID ORGANIZATION)

2.1 Aid Organization was established in 1958. Aid Organization has now developed as one of the leading national Non-Government Organization (NGO) in Bangladesh. Within the country, Aid Organization works with the Government and cooperates with other Non-Government and private organizations in the relevant fields. Aid Organization works for reduction of human sufferings by improving the socio-economic status of the poor, disadvantaged and marginalized people, specially girls and women in difficult situations, both in rural and urban areas. It is relentlessly trying to promote human development, freeing the backward communities from the curse of illiteracy, poverty, malnutrition, poor sanitation, ill health, disease, deprivation and exploitation, and inspiring them with hopes and aspiration for a better living and a Better Tomorrow.

2.2 Aid Organization has been implementing a wide variety of programs and undertaking a large number of activities focused towards providing various socio-economic and legal services to millions of people, of which over 70% are women. Gender mainstreaming is increasing gaining prominence in Aid Organization's policies and programs. It is now believed that gender inequity is still a reality and it has to be removed to bring about a positive change in the lives of women and girls.

2.3 With a view to integrate gender concerns in its policies and programs, Aid Organization established the Gender and Development (GAD) Cell in 1995 with the Divisional Heads and all Project Heads as members. The Cell is chaired by Aid Organization's Executive Director. The GAD Cell has been entrusted with the responsibility of increasing women's participation and ensuring gender equity in all Aid Organization's development programs and eventually achieving gender equality among its beneficiaries. Since its establishment, the GAD Cell has been giving advice and consultation on various aspects of gender to various Divisions of Aid Organization, Project Heads, and their beneficiaries at the field level. The GAD Cell has developed this Gender Policy with a view to providing more systematic and effective approach towards reducing discrimination against women in various fields.

3. Country Context

3.1 Although constitutionally men and women are equal in Bangladesh yet there are numerous and varied discriminations against women in all spheres. Literacy rate for women is hardly half of the figure for men. Girls are sent to school last and they are the ones who drop out first with the slightest economic jerk. There is no scope for sustaining the literacy that they acquire before dropping off. The girls do not have the right or power to say no over the decision their parents make on their marriage at whatever age they may be.; they even have no control over their pregnancy, the timing, spacing or the number of children to be gotten. Divorce is carried out by men at their whims and with ulterior motive of going for multiple marriages. Marriages are often not registered although the existing laws demand registration of all marriages. Consequently, legal support for any illegal divorce cases gets nullified on various pleas. There is also serious discrimination within the family, women and girls are last to be fed, getting nothing most of the time, They are also the ones that suffer from sever malnutrition, fall sick easily and last to get medical attention, if at all.

3.2 On the economic front, women have little ownership on family assets, little control over family decisions and far less in any matter at the society level. They neither have technical skills for employment nor have the

opportunities for such skills training, their movements outside the four walls of the house are restricted, their contributions in the family income are hardly reconed, and indeed, they have to bear the maximum burden of poverty.

3.3 Socially, women enjoy a very low status in the family and are socialized to remain subservient to men. From the very moment after birth till death a woman always remains dependent on someone, at childhood she is dependent on parents, after marriage on the husband and at old age on her children. Women are not aware of their rights and entitlements, and any protest against injustice or maltreatment is subdued rather ruthlessly; the society is still not prepared to see women in the social, economic or political mainstreams. In recent years, however, there has been a gradual shift in attitude towards women. Girls are allowed to attend schools; women are permitted to work outside, intra-family discrimination in terms of food distribution, education and medical attention has reduced and women are now even allowed to participate in local and national politics. Yet women do not know how to promote their cause and how to achieve equality with men. The slow improvement in the position of girls and women that has taken place in Bangladesh is primarily due to series of interventions undertaken both the Government and NGOs.

3.4 Key gender issues in Bangladesh include gender dimensions of poverty, which encompass situation of female-headed households and women in terms of their position in the labour market and their accessibility to various services, assets, financial resources, and income generating activities. It also relates to intra-household distribution of food intake and personal security. Women's access to social services is another important issue which covers women's access to education, safe water supply, sanitation, health services, etc. Environmental issues as deforestation, drying of the wetlands, natural disasters and their impact on women are also important areas that need to be covered in the analysis of gender dimension of poverty. Nevertheless, women's participation in politics, social decision making processes and, *shalish* are being counted as indicators of reduction in gender gap in the society and a greater impact of women empowerment activities.

4. Scope of the Gender Policy

4.1 From the preceding discussion it is apparent that gender differentiation, discrimination and exploitation exists in Bangladesh at all levels, Women are deprived of information, lack access to resources, receive less priority in getting education, medical treatment, training, and all other development services. In many organizations female staff members even at the higher management level fail to unleash their potentials and make appropriate impact at the organizational level due to lack of gender sensitivity and responsive and enabling environment. A gender policy of an organization sets the modalities of relationship between women and men and also defines their roles, responsibilities, attitudes, behavior and identities i.e. it gives a direction to the status and situation of women and men within the organization. A Gender Policy is necessary as a well-planned working procedure/ management tool to form the base for organizing activities, direct, control and motivate all sorts of work, and to set certain sense of direction in achieving gender equality.

In Aid Organization, integration of gender issues in development programs is felt at all levels. The gender policy will help in designing and integrating gender concerns in the various fields of operation as a cross-cutting issue. It will help in incorporating the concerns of both women, and men while designing, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies and programs which will benefit both and will put an end to perpetuation of inequality.

4.2 The goal of the Gender Policy is to achieve gender equality at the organizational level as well as the programme level. Therefore, to create an excellent conducive work environment within the organization for women and men, it is necessary to:

- To develop a common understanding on gender concept
- Make all staff gender sensitive
- Understand gender roles and gender division of labor
- Work towards reducing gender inequality and
- Build respectable working relations among the staffs,

4.3 Mainstreaming of gender is an operational priority that includes women and men of all ages, as well as children. To ensure that gender issues are properly addressed and included in AID ORGANIZATION 's work, it should start by analyzing the relationships between women and men within the family and the community and how these affect their access to development programs. Gender policy will help to set the screening criteria to remind that 'development is for all' and assist to monitor the impacts in a gender responsive manner.

5. Definitions

Unless there is anything repugnant in the subject and the context, the following terms will have the meanings as assigned to them:

Sex	Sex is the <u>natural biological construction</u> and differences between men and women which are universal and <u>not changeable</u> .
Gender	Gender is <u>the social construction determining differences in</u> roles and responsibilities of men and women. It is created <u>by men</u> in the families, societies and cultures <u>which is changeable</u> . It also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviour of both women and men (femininity and masculinity).
Gender Analysis	Gender analysis is the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated information. It also means systematically analyzing and assessing the impact of development policies and programmes for equitable socio-economic development. [Gender analysis explores difference in experience, knowledge, talents and needs of women and men so that policies, programmes and projects can identify and meet the different needs of men and women. Gender analysis also facilitates the strategic use of distinct knowledge and skills possessed by women and men.]
Sex-disaggregated Data	Sex-disaggregated data is the data that is collected and presented separately on men and women.
Discrimination against women	Means any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of <u>only because of being women</u> which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status. Discriminations are also visible between men and women in terms of enjoying human rights and fundamental freedoms in the fields of political, economic, social, cultural and civil affairs.
Literacy Gender Parity Index (GPI)	Literacy Gender Parity Index is the ratio of the female to male adult literacy rates which measures progress towards gender equity in literacy and the level of learning opportunities available for women in relation to those available to men.
Empowerment	Empowerment means <u>taking control of the system or able to make and execute decision by</u> both women and men over their lives, setting their own agendas, gaining skills, building self-confidence, solving problems and developing self-reliance.
Gender Equality	Gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development.
Gender Equity	Equity means lack of discrimination or bias. Gender equity is the process of being fair to men and women.
Gender Blindness	Non-recognition of the existing gender inequality and the factors that perpetuate such inequality.
Gender Awareness	Recognition that women and men have diverse needs, interests and priorities for their own development and which should be made conversant for achieving gender equality.
Gender Roles	Socially perceived differences between men and women that defines

how men and women should think, act and feel. [Gender roles are constantly changing and may vary within and between cultures]

Gender Division of Labour	Different work that men and women do as a consequence of their socialization and accepted patterns of work within a given context.
Women in Development (WID)	'Women in development' is an approach which aims to integrate women into the existing development process by targeting them, often in women-specific activities.
Gender and Development (GAD)	Gender and development is an approach which focuses on unequal gender relations that prevent equitable development and which often lock women out of full participation.
Strategic Gender Interests	'Strategic gender interests' means long-term structural changes in society regarding women's status and equity which may include legislation for equal rights, reproductive choice, and increased participation in decision-making.
Gender Lens	Gender Lens popularly means a list of questions, a checklist or a list of criteria in any field created in participatory manner and is routinely used.
Gender mainstreaming	Gender Mainstreaming means encouraging women's equal participation in decision making process including political participation.
Gender Planning	Gender Planning means designing strategies that aim at providing equal opportunities for men and women
Affirmative Action	Achieving gender equality will require specific measures designed to eliminate gender inequalities. Special temporary measures may be taken to help women overcome the results of past discriminations or present inequalities that affect their performance at work. Once these discriminations have been overcome these special temporary measures may be removed.

6. Vision and Scope of Work

6.1 Aid Organization envisions a society with reduced poverty and violence and any kind of discrimination between and against women and men where human rights are both the means and the ends of development. Therefore, the goal of the Gender Policy is to strengthen Aid Organization as a gender sensitive organization and to contribute towards reducing gender inequality in the family, community, society, country. The Gender Policy aims at facilitating narrowing the gender gap and strives for attaining an equitable social and economic development by integrating gender perspectives in development programs.

6.2 Objectives

The scope of work under the Gender Policy includes, but not limited to:

1. Protect human rights for women and men and eliminate all forms of discrimination
2. Provide opportunities for empowerment of women in the political, social, cultural, administrative and economic sphere
3. Sensitize Aid Organization employees on gender, create gender sensitive working environment within Aid Organization and develop the culture of equality of women and men;
4. Create an enabling environment to ensure equitable partnership of men and women in social, cultural, economic and political development of the society and develop capacity of the society to eliminate gender discrimination (s)
5. Strengthen partnership between government organizations, professional bodies, civil society and national and international organizations to incorporate gender perspective into various development programmes to reduce gender inequality;
6. Advocate gender equality in all awareness programmes through multi-channel and multi-media for wider dissemination
7. Ensure access to quality education for girls and women as the prime vehicle to reduce gender inequality, and provide enhanced opportunities to women to participate in all spheres of activities of Aid Organization and eventually to achieve gender equality
8. Use gender lens in all fields of operation of Aid Organization, utilize gender parity index (GPI) wherever possible and undertake gender analysis as a basis for all relevant activities
9. Incorporate gender issues in management planning, decision making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of activities
10. Facilitate extensive use of GAD approaches in all projects of Aid Organization
11. Encourage affirmative action to ensure advancement of women within the organization as well as at the project level
12. Systematically collect and maintain sex-disaggregated data for gender analysis as a basis of undertaking any intervention.

The Gender Policy is intended to make fundamental issues involved in gender understandable to all concerned and to create awareness about needs and necessity of gender equality in the society for over all development and societal improvement. Aid Organization will use the gender policy as a guideline for policy makers, management, employees, beneficiaries and partners of Aid Organization.

7. Guiding principles and Policy Framework

The Gender Policy has been designed to guide all staff members of Aid Organization including those at the grassroots level, to perform roles that contribute progressively towards gender equality. Gradually AID ORGANIZATION will emerge as one of the most gender sensitive and caring organization in which women would play a significant role. To achieve its vision Aid Organization will initiate the following actions:

7.1 Recruitment

1. Conscious and deliberate attempts shall be made to reduce the gap and balance the number of female and male staff-members within Aid Organization.
2. While recruiting staff members, all advertisements shall mention "preference will be given to suitable female candidates", and during selection female candidate(s) shall be given preference with equal test scores
3. Consider gender sensitivity as an important criterion in the written and oral test for selection of new staff at all levels.
4. More women participation in the recruitment board shall be ensured gradually as far as possible
5. Females should be given preference for any work in Aid Organization particularly where it enhances gender equality
6. Placement in a work place where a female staff might be at risk shall be avoided
7. Pregnancy should not be considered as a disqualification and AID ORGANIZATION shall not discourage any pregnant woman in perusing her job till a period when her pregnancy is not at risk
8. In all new recruitments gender balance shall be maintained as far as possible
9. Take initiatives to increase women participation at the higher management level

7.2 Posting and transfer

1. Aid Organization shall, as far as possible, try to post the husband and wife in the same station if they are both Aid Organization staff members provided that the quality of work is not at question. Similar decision shall also be taken in case of transfer
2. Transfer of pregnant women from the first month of pregnancy till the 5th month after delivery shall be avoided as far as possible, however, if situation so arise transfer could be made in consultation with the woman concerned to ensure her safety and security of the pregnancy or the newborn
3. Posting and transfer of male staff whose wife is in similar condition shall be considered in the above perspective;

7.3 Promotion

1. Both women and men staff shall get equal opportunity in the case of promotion. No discrimination shall be made against women and men in case of promotion, if they are competent and qualified.
2. Other things being equal, women staff shall be given preference for promotion as far as possible to have more women in senior management level.

7.4 Zero Tolerance Policy for Sexual harassment

A 'Zero Tolerance Policy' for any '*sexual harassment*' shall be practiced within the organization. It shall also be applicable in cases of mental harassment, physical violation, and multiple marriages. Stern punitive actions shall be taken against the employee subject to proper investigation.

7.5 Leave

1. Female employees should be allowed to enjoy maternity leave up to a period of 3 months (up to two children); dates shall have to be recommended by a registered physician. In addition, annual leave may also be allowed with maternity leave if so requested by the employee. In case of complications, if duly certified by a registered physician, the employee could take leave for another two months without pay which shall not affect her regular service condition and promotion. Such leave in the case of employees on contract service will be governed by the conditions of their contract.
2. Since mother care is often urgently required during a child's illness, women employees shall be allowed special / extra ordinary leave as per service rules of the organization.
3. One week of Paternity Leave with pay shall also be allowed to a male employee from the day of birth of the child. This shall be allowed up to two children.

7.6 Financial and other facilities

1. Female staff and spouse of male staff shall get equal opportunity in case of special medical expenses relating to child birth (maximum 2 children) according to the rules of organization.
2. Withdrawing money from the provident fund to use during childbirth shall be allowed, as per Provident Fund rules.

7.7 Transport and communication facilities

1. All female staff of Aid Organization both at head offices and project offices shall be given preference in the provision of transport facilities for pick up and drop from home, if required vehicles for such services are available.
2. Female staff of Aid Organization shall get preference in the provision of office vehicle during the field visit, if required vehicles for such services are available.
3. In case of emergency, and to avoid any risk, female staff shall be provided with a guide or any other suitable measure shall be taken, which the authority may deem fit.

7.8 Staff development

1. In the case staff development through attending higher education courses, training, workshop, seminar etc. both within the country and abroad, necessary steps shall be taken to ensure balanced appropriate female representation.
2. Organize gender training for all staff so that they become efficient to consider gender issues in program implementation strategy/mechanism.
3. All relevant curriculum and modules of training developed by AID ORGANIZATION shall be modified gradually to incorporate gender concepts and sensitivities wherever necessary;
4. Gender issues shall be incorporated in all the training programmes offered by AID ORGANIZATION ;
5. Specific and need-based human resource development training courses shall be undertaken to upgrade relevant skills of women employees wherever feasible.

7.9 Physical Facilities

1. A separate prayer room/space will be kept for women staff
2. Toilets at all offices of the organization would be reserved for the women staffs
3. A pregnant employee would be given a comfortable work room/space

7.10 Other facilities

1. The following special facilities for women shall be provided, subject to availability of required resources and facilities.
2. Day-care center (from 2 months to one year) with reasonable facilities for the working mothers.
3. Two hours of lunch break for lactating mothers to feed the baby, if day care facility is not available.
4. Transport from home to office and back during late pregnancy, if vehicles are available.
5. Secured accommodation for the women staff at the field level.
6. A helping hand to mothers to attend their babies at organization's cost (up to two year) while on assignment outside headquarters for short duration, subject to availability of budgetary provision.

10. Policy relevance to Aid Organization Interventions

10.1 Gender inequality is created in many ways, among which social structure and economic/ developmental projects/activities are very important. While the social structure creates and perpetuates inequality gradually over time, development projects and activities may create inequality between women and men quite rapidly. On the other hand, well conceived gender sensitive projects may quickly reduce gender inequality. There are several other elements, which, if planned appropriately, can contribute towards improving gender equality. These include project preparation reflecting strategic gender interests, guarding women and children during and after natural calamities and man-made problems, providing specific nutrition needs and health facilities including water and sanitation, guarding against HIV/ AIDS / STIs and making information technology available to women. Literacy, education including continuing education, skills training, micro-credit facilities for self-employment etc. can contribute towards poverty alleviation for women among Aid Organization beneficiaries.

10.2 Within the social structure certain elements perpetuate gender inequality, which include among others, lack of provision for sharing of asset and participation in decision making, early marriage, un-registered marriage, dowry, divorce, no control over the number of children to be gotten etc. have very adverse effect on women and the girls. Aid Organization will consciously address these issues through its well-trained, gender-sensitive staff at the head office and field level.

11. Policy Implementation

Specific plan should be prepared for implementation of the Gender Policy in a phased manner. GAD Cell will be responsible to facilitate implementation of the Gender Policy. The following strategies will be adopted to ensure effective implementation of the gender policy:

- Get the gender policy approved by the top policy making body of Aid Organization
- Create gender awareness among employees at all levels following appropriate ways and means
- Publicize and distribute the gender policy among all employees of Aid Organization and ensure that they understand the spirit of the policy
- Review and revise all internal policies, procedures and rules in the light of the gender policy
- Undertake periodic audit about the status of implementation of the gender policy
- Review and update the gender policy to make the same respond to the needs of the time
- Make GAD as an important issue for project/program design and implementation

The Process

11.1 The GAD Cell of Aid Organization will have the primary responsibility for reporting implementation of the Gender Policy. In collaboration with the concerned divisions and institutions, GAD cell will initiate plans of activities, maintain liaison with them.

11.2 All Divisions and Institutions of Aid Organization, heads of projects and field level offices will extend all possible cooperation and assistance in functioning of the GAD Cell for implementation of the Gender Policy.

11.3 To ensure the implementation of gender policy at the organization level, one person from each division/ unit of the head office, one person from each field and project offices, shall be designated as Gender Focal Point (GFP) and a second person as the Alternative Gender Focal Point. Of these two at least one has to be a woman wherever possible. The GAD Cell shall establish contact with the Gender Focal Points for any reference in the matter of implementation of the Gender Policy. The Gender Focal Points will generally be for two years. Concerned Division/Institution may change/replace or allow the Gender Focal Points to continue beyond two years, if necessary. TOR for GFP should include following functions:

- Facilitate and follow –up implementation of the Gender Policy;
- Promote gender sensitization in areas under its jurisdiction;
- Collect and disseminate all gender related information from and to the field level staff;
- Be available to colleagues to discuss issues related to gender in the workplace and elsewhere;
- Oversee the sexual harassment or gender discrimination cases within the organization and would take the necessary initiatives confidentially involving the GAD Cell of Aid Organization; GFP will inform the GAD cell about any form of sexual harassment confidentially and would assist the GAD Cell for appropriate inquiry of the case to take decision;
- Attend and contribute to gender related training workshops and meetings as and when required;

11.4 The GAD Cell will convene structured meetings with the Gender Focal Points– at least once in 3 months to discuss about the situation of the reduction of gender inequality in the area of their jurisdiction and other relevant matters; Prepare a half yearly report in a way and in the format as desired by the GAD Cell;

11.5 To ensure the implementation of gender policy at the project level, one person from each project office will be designated as gender technical person. This position would be from management level, preferably from the top management of that project or project field office, who has strong technical and analytical knowledge on issues concerning gender, and can play an advisory role to the matters. GFPs are also to be reportable to the GAD cell related to gender issues.

11.5 The GAD Cell will prepare a Comprehensive Yearly Report on the position of implementation of the Gender Policy, including any suggestions for modification, extension of the provisions of the Gender Policy for expediting reduction of gender inequality within Aid Organization and in the society;

11.6 GAD cell will take initiative to gender Audit annually to oversee the advancement of gender policy at the organizational level. Gender Audit also will take place at the program level before taking any project or intervention at the fields;

11.7. Introduce and implementation of 'Zero tolerance Policy' in case of sexual harassment at the organization and program level through GFPs;

11.8. GAD Cell will be responsible to enhance capacity of GFPs for the better implementation of the policy;

11.9. A 'Complain Box' would be introduced to inform the GAD cell about any form of sexual harassment, gender discrimination within the organization and programme level, if more confidentiality is necessary.

12. Annual Planning

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- All divisions and projects will be responsible to take required visible initiatives in each one's annual plan to address gender advancement;
- The GAD Cell of AID ORGANIZATION will develop annual work plans stating various steps for implementation of the Gender Policy during the year;
- All Divisions/Institutions and their subordinate offices will be encouraged to incorporate measures for reduction of gender inequality into their annual plans;
- The GAD Cell will extend all possible cooperation to the Divisions/ Institutions to develop and implement gender sensitive plans and programs.
- Periodic Budget to cover costs associated with the implementation of the Gender Policy will be prepared by the Gender Cell and submitted to the Executive Director for approval as he deems fit.

13. Monitoring:

- Develop gender-sensitive tools and indicators both qualitative and quantitative for measuring the participation, changes and development of men and women in relation to women's empowerment
- GAD Cell of AID ORGANIZATION will monitor the progress of implementation of the Gender Policy;
- The Gender Focal Points will collect gender disintegrated data required under the Gender Policy and in related matters. The data so collected will be submitted to the GAD Cell for the purpose of documentation and monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of various provisions of the Gender Policy;
- GAD Cell would make sure to review and incorporate task on advancement of Gender policy in all staff's Job Description.
- For undertaking research to validate some proposition or to collect specialized data, or for documentation of some learning, the GAD Cell will work in close cooperation with the Research Division of AID ORGANIZATION .

14. General

1. This Gender Policy will come into force after approval of the same by the Executive Committee of Aid Organization and on a date to be decided by the said Executive Committee.
2. After approval of the Gender Policy, it will be translated into Bangla. Both Bangla and English versions will be disseminated at all levels.
3. Orientation about Gender Policy for old and new recruited staff, who will facilitate orientation sessions on gender policy
4. Any matter arising out of this Gender Policy viz-a-viz other rules, regulations and documents of Aid Organization, will be settled by the Executive Director of Aid Organization.
