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Gender Policy

1. Introduction

1.1. Action on Poverty (AOP)

Action on Poverty (AOP) is an independent, secular, not for profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO). Founded in Australia in 1968, AOP was incorporated in the state of New South Wales in 1983. AOP works with partners and communities in Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

AOP is committed to supporting work that is of the highest standard, and in doing so, holds full accreditation with the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). AOP is a signatory to the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Code of Conduct which requires high standards of corporate governance, public accountability and financial management to be in place.

AOP Vision: For all people to transcend the injustice, indignity, and inequality of entrenched poverty.

AOP Mission: To empower local changemakers to break the cycle of poverty in their communities.

1.2 Background and Rationale

The AOP Gender Policy defines AOP's commitments to support gender equality and the principles expressed in international agreements in this regard. The accompanying implementation guidelines set out mechanisms and minimum standards for AOP staff and partners to subscribe to. AOP recognises that gender refers to socially constructed roles and relationships between women and men which are learned, change over time, and vary within and between countries and cultures according to social, religious, historical and economic factors[1].

AOP recognises that gender inequality hampers the ability of women, men, boys and girls achieve their full potential and limits the communities' ability to develop and break free from poverty.

AOP recognises that its programs and projects regardless of their focus have great leverage to contributing to closing the gender gap. Advancing gender equality objectives is integral and central to our work. AOP believes that the community has a critical role in addressing gender inequality and AOP will intentionally support programs and projects that assist the community in advancing gender equality.

AOP recognises that gender equality is central to economic and human development. However it is cognisant of the fact that gender inequality in many societies remains to be a challenge. Equal opportunity for women and men, particularly in economic development and poverty alleviation, remains elusive and is a manifestation of their inability to fully exercise their rights.

The Gender Gap between women and men, boys and girls is still most prominent in developing countries. In education, there are 781 million adults and 126 million youth worldwide who still lack basic literacy skills, and more than 60 per cent of them are women. According to the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Report 2014 for Africa, of the 49 African countries with data, 18

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[1] World Health Organisation, What do we mean by sex and gender, accessed on 15/01/2015, http://www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/

countries have achieved gender parity in primary school enrolment[2]. However, gender disparity in secondary education is larger with girls' enrolment ratios still very low compared to boys particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Pacific as well as Western and Southern Asia. In Africa, Western Asia and the Pacific, 60 per cent of women were in vulnerable employment compared to 54 per cent of men[3].

The maternal mortality ratio in Sub-Saharan Africa is the highest in the world with 510 deaths per 100,000, followed by Southern Asia, Pacific and the Caribbean with 190 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. The birth rate from young adolescent mothers is approximately 117 births per 1,000 girls in sub-Saharan Africa[4].

Gender-based violence remains as the most prevalent violation of women's human rights. One WHO study indicated that 35% of women worldwide have experienced either intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime[5].

1.3 Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this Gender Policy is to provide direction for AOP and its partners to strategically advance gender equality goals within the organisations programs, procedures and systems, roles and accountabilities.

1.4 Guiding Principles

The AOP Gender Policy is underpinned by the following principles:

- AOP believes that Gender Equality or **equality between women and men** refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female[6].

- Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men[7].

- Gender equality is not only a women's issue but an issue of the whole community and should concern and fully engage men as well as women.

- AOP will implement gender mainstreaming, a strategy defined as "…the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality"[8].

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[2] United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, African Union, African Development Bank and United Nations Development Programme. MDG 2014 Report: Assessing progress in Africa toward the Millennium Development Goals : Analysis of the Common African Position on the post-2015 Development Agenda. Ethiopia, October 2013. Page 40

[3] Millennium Development Goals 2014 Report. Accessed 18 November 2014 http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2014%20MDG%20report/MDG%202014%20English%20web.pdf . Page 16-19

[4] Ibid, page 28-32

[5] World Health Organization. Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and nonpartner sexual violence. October 2013. Page 1 of the Executive Summary.

[6] UN Women. Definitions and Concepts. Accessed on 18 November 2014 http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsandefinitions.htm

[7] Ibid

[8] United Nations, ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions, 1997/2, accessed on 15 November 2014. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/ECOSOCAC1997.2.PDF

- Gender inequality is rooted in the way women, men, boys and girls are perceived and expected to act and behave as females and males in a given society. These roles and expectations are well entrenched in the social norms and beliefs system of that society. These roles and expectations shape what males and females will have, what they can do and what they can be. These roles, expectations, and relationships between males and females will be different from one community to the next, from one country to the next. Understanding gender inequality in a given context is a basic requirement to ensuring that programs and projects are considering the implications and possible effects of programs and projects to men, women, boys and girls.

- Efforts to address gender inequality should also recognise and address the unequal gender relations that exist between women and men. Such that improving women's economic empowerment does not only entail increasing her access to economic resources but also include her ability to decide in equal terms with men, the use of household income.

- AOP acknowledges that the solution to ending gender inequality is the responsibility of men, women, governments, organisations, institutions and the whole community.

1.5 Our Commitment

a) AOP is committed to ensuring gender equality in all areas of the organisation, and ensures that both women and men are provided with equal opportunity to be involved in the organisation and its work.
b) AOP will continue to ensure all recruitment processes are based on individual qualifications and work experiences. However, where a male and a female candidate for a position are considered of equal merit, then gender balance will be taken into consideration in making the final decision.
c) AOP board, senior management and staff will remain committed to the integration of gender equality throughout the organisation. Discrimination based on gender (including transgender) will not be tolerated.
d) AOP recognises the relevance of both women and men in parenting their children, and is committed to providing a reasonable number of days for parental leave, in compliance with AOP's Leave Policy.
e) AOP is committed to ensuring that its staff receive training to enable them to work in alignment with AOP's Gender Policy. AOP staff will also be encouraged to work with partners to assess or develop their capacity to work in alignment with AOP's gender policy.
f) AOP will adhere to applicable labor legislation, and ensure that women and men receive equal pay for equal or similar work, subject to human resources management policies and guidelines. Any disadvantage brought about by discrimination on account of gender will be redressed.

2. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all staff and associated personnel.

'Staff' refers to: full time, part time, international and national, and those engaged on short term contracts such as: consultants, contractors, researchers, photographers, journalists and media personnel.

'Associated Personnel' refer to: volunteers, board members, visitors and personnel in partner agencies that have a formal/contractual relationship with AOP.

3. AOP Programs: Gender Considerations

Promoting gender equality is fundamental and integral to AOP's mission in working with communities towards the achievement of their own development aspirations. To do this, AOP will:

3.1 Ensure that women, men, boys and girls benefit from and participate in all AOP's programs and projects.

a) AOP will continue to integrate approaches that address gender issues that are central to our programmatic areas. These include but not limited to the following:

Food security

- Support programs and projects that encourage communities to recognise the role of women and support them in attaining household food security and promote children's health.
- Support initiatives that will allow access of women and men to economic resources, health information and nutritional education.
- Support initiatives that intentionally improve access to quality and healthy food for lactating and pregnant women to ensure the survival of newborns and work with communities to eradicate food discrimination, if this exists.

Livelihoods and Economic Development

- Support programs which promote women's equal access to capital, market information and services, credit and savings programs, training and mentoring.
- Intentionally include efforts to address social, cultural barriers that limit women from actively engaging in the economy in all economic development projects.
- Engage with men to increase their understanding and support for women's active engagement in the economy.

Environment, Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

- Support initiatives that address the vulnerabilities of women and men bearing in mind the existing disadvantages faced by many women due to inequality – limited access to resources, lack of decision making powers, safety and security issues and their reproductive burden.
- Support initiatives that recognize the similar and distinct coping abilities of women and men and strengthen their capacities to build their resilience.
- Support initiatives that address the practical needs of women and men to support them in building their resilience and explore strategic opportunities to challenge and change negative gender norms that limit women and men's resiliency.

Health

- Support initiatives which will contribute to facilitating equitable access of women, men, boys and girls to quality health care information and services throughout their lives.
- Integrate and encourage the involvement of men as responsible fathers and carers of their children.

Governance

- Support initiatives that intentionally target women leaders in becoming stronger agents for positive change within their community.
- Influence governance systems that integrate and include women and men of all ages to exercise their rights as active citizens.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

- Support initiatives that promote women's active involvement in decision making related to WASH.
- Implement WASH projects that are informed by the needs of women and girls who are the primary users of water, traditionally the health carers of the family and who have specific hygienic needs.
- Engage men as agents of change in his family and his community around health practices and encourage men to be active carers of their family.

3.2 Contribute to addressing the gender inequality issues faced by women and girls as far as opportunity and resources, voice and agency, and serious safety and security issues. These all limit women and girls ability to fully participate in development activities and benefit from development outcomes

Working through our programmatic areas, AOP will continue to work with our partner communities to address the following issues critical to women's empowerment including women's economic empowerment, gender based violence and womens leadership and political participation.

3.3 AOP will undertake the following:

a) Integrate gender in program planning, monitoring and evaluation.

All AOP program and project designs, regardless of the focus, will be informed by gender analysis which is a process of assessing the impact that a development activity may have on females, males and on gender relations. Gender analysis is also used to ensure that women and men will not be disadvantaged by development activities; to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of activities; and to identify priority areas for action to promote equality between women and men[9]. Program and project designs will also articulate gender equality objectives with indicators which will be reported upon by project implementers.

All programs and projects will collect and use sex-disaggregated data and other gender-related information to inform the design, and as part of monitoring and evaluation activities to ensure that the programs and projects' contribution to gender equality objectives are measured.

b) Work with partners to build their capacity in addressing gender inequality.

Working with partners in country, AOP will endeavour to build the capacity of partners and influence their policies and programs to be more gender-responsive. Capacities will be built to assist them in facilitating conversations and dialogues with the communities towards identifying gender issues and supporting community action to address them.

c) Advocate and influence the Aid Program.

AOP will intentionally engage with the Australian Government's Aid Program to influence its policy on gender and development. AOP's programmatic successes and its exposure to working with communities overseas on gender issues will inform AOP's advocacy with the government.

4. Implementation Mechanisms

All AOP staff are hereby mandated to promote gender equality within AOP's programs. AOP encourages staff to explore all possible ways to recognise, understand and support implementation of initiatives that contribute to addressing gender issues and advancing gender equality.

In support of this endeavour, the following mechanisms will be developed and implemented:

Gender Strategy and Action Plan: To implement this policy, AOP will develop a Gender Strategy and Action plan which will provide details on how gender will be integrated in AOP's Strategic Framework and the steps that need to be undertaken to make AOP's operations more gender responsive. The Gender Strategy and Action Plan should specifically identify the results and outcomes that need to be achieved by the organisation.

Staff Capacity: Senior management will strengthen organisational mechanisms to support improvement of gender capacity within the organisation. All staff will be supported to increase their capacity to recognise and understand gender equality issues through professional development as

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[9] Hunt, Juliet, 'Introduction to gender analysis concepts and steps', Development Bulletin, no. 64, pp. 100-106. 2004

well as on-the job exposure. It is expected for staff to explore all possible ways to learn from integrating gender through its projects and working with partners.

Accountability: It is the responsibility of senior management to monitor and report progress and achievements in implementing this policy. They will be accountable for translating this policy to measurable strategy and action points throughout the work of the organisation.

5. Review

This Policy will be monitored on an ongoing basis and will be reviewed at least every 3 years to ensure that it remains relevant to the needs of AOP and its partners.

The AOP Gender and Development Policy was developed and adopted by the Board in November 1999.

The AOP Gender and Development Policy was reviewed and adopted by the Board in:

- December 2008
- December 2011

The AOP AOP Gender Policy was reviewed, significantly revised and Adopted by the Board on 18 February 2015.

Gender Policy due for review in June 2017.

Gender Glossary

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and relationships between women and men. These are learned, change over time, and vary within and between countries and cultures according to social, religious, historical and economic factors[10].

Gender analysis is a process of assessing the impact that a development activity may have on females, males and on gender relations. It is also used to ensure that women and men will not be disadvantaged by development activities, or to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of activities or to identify priority areas for action to promote equality between women and men Gender Equality or e**quality between women and men** refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy or process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality

Gender-based Violence are violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It is interchangeably used with violence against women, defined by the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 1993, as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life[11].

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[10] World Health Organisation, What do we mean by sex and gender, accessed on 15/01/2015, http://www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/
[11] The United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).