

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 takes a rights-based approach to its work and is committed to supporting work that is of the highest standard. In doing so, AOP holds full accreditation with the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and is a signatory to the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) Code of Conduct which requires the highest standards of development practice, 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 commitment to support gender equality, increased social inclusion and social justice in line with the principles that are expressed in the international human rights agreements that underpin our work. We believe that to alleviate poverty, all people need to have equal access to rights and opportunities

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 should not depend on whether they are born male or female¹

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 factors². Recognising that there are local legal frameworks around these issues, both cultural understanding and context specific interventions are required.

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. Despite some gains having been made in recent decades, gender inequality persists, and remains very entrenched in some parts of the world and this inhibits the capacity for women to reach their potential. The continued and heightened focus on gender equity in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) highlight how women and girls remain under-represented in leadership, perform a disproportionate share of unpaid work, are deprived access to education and health care and continue to be at increased risk of being subjected to gender based violence globally simply because of their gender. There is still much work to be done if we are to address this situation.

¹ UN Women. Definitions and Concepts. Accessed on 25 March 2021
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>

² We recognise that many individuals identify as male or as female. However, we recognise that gender is a concept that is not binary. It includes a continuum of possibilities. To facilitate ease of reading within this policy we refer to women, men, girls, and boys throughout. This does not in any way diminish our commitment to and work with individuals with other gender identities.

Our programs and projects, regardless of their focus, have great potential to leverage and contribute to addressing gender inequity in the places where we work. Therefore, promoting gender equality objectives can be seen as both a means and an end goal in achieving and advancing our mission

2. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this Gender Policy is to provide clear direction for AOP personnel and send consistent gender messages to our partners in order to strategically advance and strengthen gender equality goals within our programs, procedures and systems, roles and accountabilities.

3. Guiding Principles

The AOP Gender Policy is underpinned by international standards and agreements, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and a number of other relevant conventions³ It is also informed by internationally accepted global aspirations such as those set out in the SDG's #5 *Increased Gender Equality* target.

We recognise that as gender norms are socially constructed and systematically privilege some groups over others, we need to be vigilant in assessing and challenging these barriers in our work.

We acknowledge there are also inherent imbalances of power to overcome, and these can be codified in law and national policy. So, in order to promote gender equality, we need to challenge patriarchy at various levels, with a view achieving social justice for everyone over time. For example, improving women's economic empowerment will not only entail increasing access to economic resources but also include increasing a women's ability to decide on equal terms with men, the use of household income. Solutions may ultimately require structural resolutions such as challenging discriminatory gender-biased laws.

We also acknowledge intersectionality is an issue when dealing with gender noting ethnicity, sexual orientation, ageism, disability etc are also factors that need to be considered as part of gender and social inclusion more generally.

In acknowledging structural barriers exist that effect gender equality from being realised, we recognise that the solution to ending gender inequality is the responsibility of men, women, governments, organisations, institutions and the whole community. Therefore, interventions need to involve all our stakeholders.

4. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all staff and associated personnel and all AOP Activities.

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

It is the responsibility of the AOP senior leadership team and the AOP nominated gender focal point to monitor and report progress and achievements of implementing this policy. The AOP Gender

³ Relevant International Agreements include: Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1954); Convention to the Consent of Marriage, Minimum Age of Marriage, and Registration of Marriages (1964); Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979); Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993); Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA) (1995); CEDAW's Optional Protocol; Maputo Protocol – Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003); Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) (2014)

Focal point is accountable for translating this policy into strategy interventions and actions.

5. Policy Statement

Promoting gender equality is fundamental and integral to AOP's mission. To this end, AOP takes a twofold approach internally within the organisation and promoting issues within our project work:

AOP's organisational Commitment is to:

- a) ensure 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) ensure recruitment processes are based on individual qualifications and work experiences. 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) Ensure 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) Provide reasonable flexibility for parental duties in line with AOP HR Policies as we recognise both women and men have parental responsibilities.
- e) Ensure that staff receive training to enable them to work in alignment with AOP's Gender Policy.
- f) Adhere to antidiscrimination legislation including ensuring that women and men receive equal pay for equal or similar work, and for ensuring that our human resources management policies reflect the principles stated in this policy.

AOP's program commitment, is to:

- a) Ensure that women, men, boys and girls benefit from and participate in all AOP's programs and are exposed to concepts of gender equality through their involvement.
- b) Integrate gender considerations into all stages of the project cycle. AOP program and project designs, regardless of the focus, will be informed by gender analysis. Project workplans will mainstream gender approaches and activities and articulate gender related indicators and outcomes. Sex-disaggregated data and other gender-related information will be collected and analysed during evaluations to ensure that the programs and projects' contribution to gender equality impacts are documented, understood and shared.
- c) Work collaboratively with partners to build their capacity in understanding and addressing gender inequality through the provision of mentoring and training and by facilitating conversations and dialogues aimed at identifying gender issues and supporting community action to address them.
- d) Encourage partnerships with relevant gender-based organisations so that our work is informed by other stakeholders and groups who are directly engaged in this space.
- e) Use evidence from our work to promote learning within our organisation and within our wider networks that will promote respect and understanding and enable us to advocate and influence others in order to effect positive change.

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 factors¹⁰.

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.

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.

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 (GBV) is 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.

Review History:

This Policy will be reviewed every 3 years to ensure that it remains relevant to the needs of AOP and its partners.

Developed and adopted by the Board in November 1999

Reviewed and re-adopted by the Board: December 2008, December 2011, 8 February 2015

Reviewed by the International Program Director: June 2018

Reviewed: March 2021

The AOP Gender Policy is due for review: March 2024