



Women's Rights & Gender Equality Policy

Managed on behalf of the ED and Board by: Head of Global Engagement

Approved by the Board on: 12 May 2017

1. Purpose

This policy outlines the organisation's stance on women's rights and gender equality and reinforce the organisation's commitment to embracing feminist principles throughout its work and organisational culture. ActionAid Australia is deeply committed to gender equality and equity and women's rights. ActionAid Australia recognises that patriarchy and poverty are inextricably linked, and believes that a feminist approach is essential to ending poverty, inequality and injustice. This includes recognition that the power imbalances between men and women, the oppression and subordination of women, and the inequalities in women's access to and control over resources are root causes of global poverty, inequality and injustice. To bring about the full realisation of equality between women and men we must be aware of gender power imbalances in all areas of our work and strive to overcome power differentials.

2. Scope

This policy applies to the following people:

- ActionAid Australia staff, contractors, consultants and volunteers;
- ActionAid Australia Board of Directors;
- partner organisations.

3. Definitions

Gender equality is a basic human right for all women and men, and it refers to equality between all genders. The organisation supports the following definition of gender equality:

"Gender equality refers to equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys...Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognising the diversity among different groups of women and men." (DFAT, 2007)

Gender equity is an important principle in achieving gender equality. It refers to fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between men and women.¹ This concept recognises that women and men have different needs and power, and that differential treatment may be required to bring women up to the same level as men. ActionAid Australia supports the following definition of gender equity:

¹ World Health Organisation (2002) *Integrating Gender Perspective in the Work of WHO*

“Gender equity refers to fairness in access to resources and in the distribution of benefits from development, according to the different needs of women, men, girls and boys.” (DFAT, 2007)

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy to ensure inclusion of women's issues and gender equality in all policy development, research, advocacy, legislation, resource allocation, planning, implementation and monitoring of programs and projects. Gender mainstreaming is intended to be transformative, changing the very definition and discourse of development to include gender equality as a means and an end. ActionAid Australia supports the definition of gender mainstreaming as defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (July 1997):

“Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part 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 of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.”

Gender responsive programming is a strategy for targeted initiatives to support women's rights and empowerment, recognising the underlying power imbalances between men and women and a need to actively redress these. It refers to programs where gender norms, roles and inequalities have been considered and measures have been taken to actively address them. Such programs go beyond raising awareness to actually addressing gender inequalities (WHO,2009) . ActionAid favours an approach that empowers women and raises their knowledge, skills, capabilities (power within) and collective power (power with) so that they can engage with men on more equal terms.

Patriarchy refers to systemic and institutionalised male domination embedded in and perpetuated by cultural, political, economic and social structures and ideologies. These systems explicitly make women inferior and subordinate, and confer control and decision making on men while making values associated with masculinity the norm or ideal².

Feminism is a range of theories and political agendas that aim to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women due to sex and gender as well as class, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, geographic location, nationality, or other forms of social exclusion³.

Women's Rights: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) outlines the human rights of all people, including women. However, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) is often described as an international bill of rights for women as it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

² Feminist Movement Builder's Dictionary, JASS Associates, February 2013

³ ibid

4. Policy Objectives

This policy aims to ensure that gender equality and women's rights underpin ActionAid Australia's:

- identity and public image;
- organisational culture and behaviours; and
- functional areas, including campaigning, communications, finance, fundraising and programming.

5. Legislative Framework & Standards

ActionAid Australia complies with the following legislation and international standards in implementing its Women's Rights & Gender Equality Policy:

- Commonwealth Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act (1999).
- Beijing Platform of Action (1995).
- Federal Sex Discrimination Act (1984), Australia.
- United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW (1978) (ratified by the Australian Government in July 1983).
- State Anti-Discrimination Act (1977), NSW.
- Sustainable Development Goals (2015)
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace & Security.

6. Guiding Principles

The principles that guide our commitment to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality include:

- using feminist principles to guide our work and using an **intersectional feminist approach**, which recognises that poverty intersects with widespread gender inequality and other forms of discrimination including race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and age, is essential to advancing social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication.
- ensuring programs analyse and respond to the different needs, interests, priorities and role of women, men, girls, boys and trans-people and the relations between them;
- supporting the agency and leadership of women living in poverty and exclusion to claim their rights and be at the forefront of efforts to create social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication;
- promoting gender equality is everyone's responsibility and by demonstrating feminist leadership we can enable women and men to individually and collectively transform themselves; advancing women's rights and gender equality and equity are the responsibility of all those who participate in the work of ActionAid Australia; and
- confronting and redefining the prevailing conceptions of power that impede the full realisation of gender equality and women's rights in our own society and in the countries where we work is needed. We must strive to redefine

power as a positive collective force, where women and men have an equitable share of resources and decision making.

7. Policy in Practice

Identity and Public Image

ActionAid Australia will be distinctly defined by its commitment to women's rights and gender equality by its peers, donors and the members of the public in Australia and the countries we work in. We will do this by:

- actively seeking to recruit Board members, staff, volunteers and supporters who are advocates of women's rights and support gender equality;
- ensuring all materials prepared for the Australian public reflect our commitment to women's rights and gender equality, challenge gender stereotypes, promote women living in poverty and exclusion as agents of change, and recognise all forms of diversity among women;
- ensuring all internal and external communications use language and images that empower women and men and reinforce our commitment to women's rights and feminist analysis ; and
- ensuring strong representation of women at external events, as media spokespeople.

Organisational Culture and Behaviours

Women's rights and gender equality will guide the way we work as an organisation as well as our individual attitudes and behaviours. As a women's rights organisation, we do this by:

- actively strengthening staff capacity and knowledge to embed a women's rights and gender equality culture within the organisation;
- ensuring all staff are familiar with ActionAid Australia's goal, principles and minimum standards as stated in this Women's Rights and Gender Equality Policy. For new staff and volunteers, the policy will be presented as part of their induction;
- supporting regular meetings of a women's forum to provide a safe space for female staff to discuss any gender-specific workplace needs or challenges;
- engaging with the ActionAid International Federation's Feminist Leadership Taskforce to ensure we are adhering to good practice;
- continuously reviewing and monitoring our HR systems and policies to ensure that they reflect our commitment to gender equality and women's rights , and integrate gender indicators into staff objectives, accountability and performance management systems;
- supporting women's leadership at all levels of the organisation and aspiring to maintain at least 50% of all staff as female, setting targets for recruitment, retention and promotion of staff where there are imbalances; and
- ensuring a minimum of 50% of senior management and leadership positions in the organisation are held by women.

Functional Areas

All of ActionAid Australia's functional areas empower women and men and promote women's rights and gender equality. We do this by:

- ensuring the rights of women living in poverty and exclusion are central to the design and development of all campaigning, fundraising, communications and programming work and women's rights analysis is incorporated into activities wherever possible;
- informing partners, donors and supporters about our gender policy and providing positive examples of ActionAid's work on women's rights and gender equality;
- developing capacity and knowledge of all staff in the area of women's rights , gender equality and feminist leadership;
- monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of our campaigns, communications, programs and fundraising activities in advancing women's rights;
- supporting the leadership of women living in poverty and exclusion to engage with men and boys to be part of the solution in the pursuit of gender equality and women's rights; and
- holding the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to account for implementation of its Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy (2016).

8. Monitoring and Review of Policy

The Head of Global Engagement is accountable to the Executive Director and Board for managing and maintaining this policy. All members of the Leadership Team are accountable for ensuring that their functional teams understand and adhere to this policy in their day-to-day work. Where compliance issues are surfaced, Leadership Team members will work with staff to address these issues promptly.

Any updates/revisions to the policy must be endorsed by the Executive Director and Leadership Team before being submitted to the ActionAid Australia Board for their approval.

Changes to Policy

Nature of changes	Date approved by Board
Policy first developed.	25 August 2011.
Key changes to policy include: (a) update to reflect ActionAid's HRBA 2 and stronger focus on women's rights and feminist values in all aspects of its work; (b) reference to the Sustainable Development Goals; and (c) updated names of roles within ActionAid Australia.	12 May 2017
Job titles updated according to the new organisational structure	26 September 2018