



## Women's Rights & Gender Equality Policy

Managed on behalf of the ED and Board by: Head of Programs

Approved by the Board on: 2 March 2024

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### 1. Purpose

This policy outlines the organisation's stance on women's rights and gender equality and reinforces the organisation's commitment to embracing feminist principles throughout its work and organisational culture. ActionAid Australia is deeply committed to gender equality, 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 of gender power imbalances, the oppression and subordination of women, and the inequalities in women's access to and control over resources, which are root causes of global poverty, inequality and injustice. To bring about the full realisation of gender equality and equity 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; and
- 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 means people have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities, regardless of gender. Throughout the paper there will be a strong focus on women and girls, as the group that disproportionately experience the negative impacts of gender inequality, however gender equality benefits all people. Gender inequality can be exacerbated by other forms of exclusion and disadvantage including those related to age, First Nations heritage, cultural and linguistic background, migration status, disability, gender identity and sexuality, as well as socio-economic status." ([National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality, 2023](#))*

**Gender equity** is an important principle in achieving gender equality. It refers to fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between all genders.<sup>1</sup> 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

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

same level as men. ActionAid Australia supports the following definition of gender equity:

*"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 ideal<sup>2</sup>.

**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 exclusion<sup>3</sup>.

**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.

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<sup>2</sup> Feminist Movement Builder's Dictionary, JASS Associates, February 2013

<sup>3</sup> 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 for Action (1995).
- Federal Sex Discrimination Act (1984), Australia.
- United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW (1979) (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.
- [DAC gender equality policy marker](#)<sup>[OBI]</sup> (OECD, 2016)
- Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion analysis - Good [practice note](#)<sup>[OBI]</sup> (DFAT, 2023)
- Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion analysis Framework ([Gender at Work Framework - As recommended by DFAT](#))

## 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 non-binary-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 all people 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;
- ensuring programs adhere to ActionAid Australia's Safeguarding & Prevention of Sexual Exploitation & Abuse Policy<sup>4</sup>; 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 people of all genders, and particularly women, 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 intersectional feminist analysis; and
- ensuring strong representation of diverse women at external events and 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 in line with ActionAid's international feminist leadership principles. As a women's rights organisation, we do this by:

- actively strengthening staff capacity and knowledge to embed a feminist leadership, 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

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<sup>4</sup> The policy aims to safeguard all people who come into contact with ActionAid through our work in humanitarian and development contexts from abuses of that power and privilege in the form of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Policy. For new staff and volunteers, the policy will be presented as part of their induction;

- supporting safe spaces for staff to discuss any gender-specific workplace needs or challenges;
- Modelling feminist leadership and ensuring space to continue to evolve the organisation's 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 feminist leadership into staff objectives, accountability and performance management systems;
- supporting women's leadership at all levels of the organisation and maintaining 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 board positions in the organisation are held by women.

## Functional Areas

All of ActionAid Australia's functional areas seek to empower people with particular attention to promoting 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 intersectional feminist analysis is incorporated into activities wherever possible;
- informing partners, donors and supporters about our gender commitments 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 Programs 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
Updated with new definitions and legislative frameworks, and evolving practice, introduction of more inclusive language	2 March 2024