



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

AKF Gender Equality Policy



1. Introduction

- 1.1. Equality is one of the core values which the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) has been driving since its establishment in 1967. AKF is committed to addressing the challenges faced by the poorest and most marginalised communities in the world by bringing together human, financial, and technical resources. Special emphasis is placed on investing in human potential, expanding equal opportunities, and improving overall living standards, irrespective of gender, age, ethnicity, and religious and geographical affiliation. To achieve gender equality, AKF has adopted a gender integration approach throughout all its policies, strategies, operations, and programme areas: Agriculture and Food Security; Civil Society; Climate Resilience; Early Childhood Development; Education; Health and Nutrition; and Work and Enterprise.
- 1.2. AKF has a long-term commitment to strengthening civil society, women's participation and leadership, and local community ownership through interventions that are informed by evidence, data, local knowledge, and extensive networks of community-led institutions. Its activities are coordinated not only with those of other agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) but also with external local, national, and international partners. AKF focuses on long-term development, including in a number of fragile contexts, which at times requires coordinated humanitarian responses with other AKDN agencies. AKF's Global Programme Framework (revised in 2021) unites activities, gender-responsive and gender-transformative approaches, and gender-sensitive indicators across all country contexts.

- 1.3. The Gender Equality Policy (GEP) sets out AKF's perspective and approach on gender equality. The policy represents a commitment by the whole organisation to support and promote gender equality within its programmes, systems, and internal operations. It provides an overall framework to guide all AKF offices in advancing gender equality through their own country-level policies, strategies, and practices.
- 1.4. The GEP not only acknowledges the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment for achieving the Foundation's vision, but also emphasises the enhanced need to generate gender and age disaggregated data for evidence-based programming in target areas. The policy also identifies and acknowledges mechanisms required to achieve gender equality across AKF, including gender analysis, gender budgeting, political will, strong leadership, gender-sensitive policy formulation, implementation of initiatives to create a conducive working environment, gender-sensitive internal and external communication, and gender integration through programmes and projects implemented by and in partnership with AKF.

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2. Rationale

- 2.1. AKF sees gender equality as critical to its mission: all people, regardless of gender, are essential participants and contributors to AKF's work in addressing the root causes of poverty and identifying and sharing effective and lasting solutions, which improve the quality of life for poor communities. While gender equality and women's empowerment are worthy goals in their own right, there is increasing evidence that they also contribute significantly to overall improved quality of life and opportunities for whole communities.
- 2.2. AKF recognises that the way it addresses gender and gender equality within the organisation - through its leadership, structure, policies, working environment, accountability mechanisms, and culture - is inextricably linked to its ability to design and deliver programmes that promote gender equality in the societies in which it works.
- 2.3. AKF works in many places that have strong norms and traditions around the roles of women and men, and where gender inequalities continue to hinder development. In these contexts, it is critical to address gender inequality both directly and indirectly, and to do so in ways that are community-led and responsive to community needs and values. Through building long-term relationships of trust with communities, AKF and its local partners can influence gender dynamics. Acceptable gender empowerment strategies are identified in consultation with communities by asking gender representatives for their input, and working collaboratively to identify challenges and responses.
- 2.4. AKF considers gender equality as integral to AKF's fundamental principles: dignity and rights of all human beings; individuals making choices for themselves and determining their own path of development; inclusiveness; sound governance based on trust, probity and accountability; and pluralism.
- 2.5. AKF is guided in its perspectives and work on gender equality by the international, regional, and national agreements that seek to advance gender equality, including the Sustainable Development Goals (2015), the UN Resolution on Women, Peace and Security (2000 and onwards), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979).
- 2.6. AKF understands that gender inequality, conflict, and fragility are key challenges to sustainable development and are inextricably linked. Addressing issues of gender inequality in fragile contexts requires systematic approaches and a contextual understanding of social norms, taking into consideration political sensitivities, environmental concerns, and other risks that perpetuate fragility. AKF's approach to working in these contexts is to carry out thorough and timely gender analysis to inform programme design and implementation, ensuring that its work is sensitive to and reflects the experience and needs of various communities and the people within them.

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3. Principles

- 3.1. Promote gender equality as a pre-requisite to achieving AKF's development goals.
- 3.2. Work with AKF Leadership to catalyse, facilitate, and institutionalise change towards gender equality and women's empowerment.
- 3.3. Measure, evaluate, and report on progress towards gender equality, and establish clear mechanisms for accountability at the staff, programme, and organisational levels.
- 3.4. Institutionalise comprehensive gender analysis and application of the Gender Equality Marker as a tool to understand specific local contexts, social norms and gender relations, and adapt all programmes and interventions to that context.
- 3.5. Work with communities, local leaders (religious, elders, etc.), community gatekeepers, gender champions, youth activists, and institutions to catalyse, facilitate, and institutionalise change towards gender equality and women's empowerment.
- 3.6. Champion gender equality and women's empowerment in collaboration and partnership with others, including governments, donors, private sector, and civil society organisations, as well as AKDN agencies.

4. Vision

Vision

- 4.1. The achievement of gender equality wherever we work:** Everyone, regardless of gender, should enjoy equal status, perceive themselves as equally valuable human beings, and live free of gender-based discrimination. All people should have equal opportunities to realise their full potential, to contribute to the development of their communities and societies, and to benefit from resources and services.
- 4.2. AKF's internal operations and culture:** AKF provides a supportive, open work environment, with equal opportunities for professional development for all staff. Staff are equally represented in senior management and decision-making; and decisions on recruitment, performance appraisal, promotion, and compensation are based on demonstrated capacity and not on gender. AKF leadership and staff have a good understanding of gender equality concepts and practices, and fully support gender equality through their attitudes, behaviour, and work. Relationships between staff are respectful and non-discriminatory.

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4.3. AKF's programmatic work:

AKF works to address the underlying beliefs and practices that create and reinforce gender inequalities; to empower the disadvantaged, regardless of gender; to develop the confidence and skills required to take control over their lives; and to create institutions and relations that facilitate an enabling environment supporting gender equality.

5. Strategies for Achieving AKF's Gender Equality Goal

Goal

- 5.1.** AKF focusses on four priority areas to promote gender equality across the organisation, ensuring contextualisation of the GEP at the country level.

1

Gender Responsive Policies, Systems, and Procedures

AKF continues to take steps to ensure policies, systems, and procedures are gender responsive through internal assessments (e.g. AKF's Gender Equality Scorecard), contextualisation of strategies and action plans, clear reporting and oversight mechanisms, mobilising resources to implement gender-responsive and gender-transformative initiatives and approaches, and consistent communication around AKF's commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment.

2

Gender Responsive Programmes

AKF integrates gender equality in its Global Programme Framework and carries out gender analysis in programme design. AKF ensures that adequate resources are invested in staff knowledge and understanding of gender equality and women's empowerment. AKF also develops robust and equitable gender-sensitive results frameworks and strengthens institutions to create an enabling environment to enhance gender equality, using timely project level gender analysis and application of the Gender Equality Marker.

3

Gender Responsive Organisational Culture

AKF continues to take steps to ensure its organisational culture is gender responsive by building inclusive, safe, enabling, supportive, and non-discriminatory work environments. AKF systematically includes a gender component in trainings, mobilises gender equality champions across the organisation, and integrates gender equality priorities across community of practice platforms.

4

Staff Competence and Representation

AKF continues to take steps to strengthen staff competence and ensure equitable representation, building staff understanding, capacity and competence on key gender equality concepts and gender-responsive approaches. AKF applies a gender equality lens to HR policies and works towards a gender-friendly work environment (e.g. flexible working arrangements, etc). AKF is also invested in developing female leaders through its Women in Leadership programme and building a strong pipeline of female staff across the organisation.

AKF’s internal institutional assessment tool – Gender Equality Scorecard

- 5.2. The Gender Equality Scorecard is a self-assessment tool for identifying current strengths and gaps related to the implementation of the GEP. It is an annual exercise used to identify what works well, what does not work (and for what reasons), and areas for improvement around gender-related policies and practices. The Gender Equality Scorecard uses a standard set of indicators to:
- Trigger internal discussions on gender equality and women’s empowerment within each office and through programmes;
 - Help AKF understand if there are any key factors missing in the design and implementation of the GEP, and identify opportunities for improvement;
 - Ensure a consistent and objective assessment of the status of gender integration practices across all of AKF’s offices and departments;
 - Track AKF’s path across a gender continuum scale with the ambition of becoming gender responsive; and,
 - Identify a set of recommendations to achieve improved gender equality results through effective policies and practices.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

Roles	Responsibilities
Everyone in the organisation	• Understands gender equality concepts, approaches, terminology, and tools used at the local, regional, and global levels. • Ensures that, as a representative of the organisation, this understanding of gender equality is reflected in behaviours, decisions, communications, and day-to-day work to advance gender equality principles. • Contributes to creating and reinforcing an organisational culture that is conducive to gender equality, diversity, and inclusion.
All senior management	• Lead and act as champions for gender equality. • Facilitate and are accountable for the implementation of AKF’s GEP. • Consistently communicate on the progress of the GEP implementation, both internally and externally.

AKF offices	• CEOs lead the Gender Equality agenda and act as gender champions. • Build staff capacity to support and promote gender equality in programmes and operations. • Develop and implement country level Gender Equality Strategies based on a comprehensive gender equality assessment, and establish, monitor, and report on programme gender equality objectives and outcomes. • Establish a country-level Gender Coordination Task Force (Working Group) as a platform to share experiences, effective practices, and learning on gender equality within AKF offices and with other AKDN agencies. • Budget for adequate staff and resources to implement the country level Gender Equality Strategy and its Gender Action Plan. • Appoint gender equality focal point(s) to serve as point persons on gender equality at the AKF level and represent the unit at the Gender Equality Community of Practice. • Report to AKF’s Gender Equality Task Force (Head Office) on the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy and its Action Plan on an annual basis. • Local programme staff use AKF’s Gender Equality Marker Guidance, screen AKF proposals from a gender perspective, and support field offices in designing gender-responsive and gender-transformative proposals.
AKF Partnerships staff	• Together with the Global Programme Team, co-lead AKF’s Gender thematic cluster and identify potential resource mobilisation opportunities to support the offices to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment. • Using AKF’s Gender Equality Marker Guidance, screen AKF proposals from a gender perspective, and support field offices in designing gender-responsive and gender-transformative proposals. • Provide information on donor policies, approaches, terminology, and expectations on gender equality to AKF offices. • Communicate AKF’s gender equality policies, actions, and accomplishments to donors, private sector, and foundations.
AKF Head Office (through its Gender Equality Task Force)	• Guide and support AKF offices in the implementation of AKF’s GEP, develop standard guidelines on establishing country level Gender Equality Strategies and Gender Action Plans, and conduct annual assessment of progress by using the Gender Equality Scorecard tool. • Lead the Gender Equality Community of Practice and facilitate and coordinate learning and knowledge management on gender equality within AKF. • Lead the review process of the AKF GEP and update every three years. • Monitor progress and report on the implementation of this policy, and report to staff and senior management on a semi-annual basis on the implementation of the AKF Gender Equality Roadmap¹. • Identify strategies and means for communicating AKF’s commitment to gender equality to internal and external audiences.

1. The Gender Equality Roadmap outlines actions and tracks progress against the commitments defined in the GEP.



7. Measuring and Reporting on Progress

In early 2020, AKF established a Gender Equality Taskforce (GETF) to drive forward the Gender Equality agenda at the organisational and programmatic levels. The GETF maintains a roadmap to update and track progress on a regular basis. The policy itself will be reviewed after three years.

The GETF provides consistent and data driven feedback to senior leadership on results and impact assessments carried out on all related initiatives, including on internal operations and culture. The GETF also recommends accompanying action plans and suggests corrective measures to ensure on-going development and improvement of the GEP and the Global Framework on Gender Equality (2021).

8. Key Definitions

This policy is based upon AKF’s understanding of the concepts of gender, gender equality, and gender equity drawn from widely accepted definitions used by UN agencies and governments.

Gender	Refers to the socially determined roles, attributes, and relationships of all individuals. These roles and relationships are learned, can vary widely within and between societies and cultures, and can change over time. Gender determines what is considered appropriate in a given culture, and the influence, power, and resources available. Gender-based identities and differences intersect with other variables such as ethnicity, class, ability, age, caste and religion.
Gender champions	Are leaders and decision makers who advance gender equality in their work with others by taking concrete actions to break down gender barriers and make gender equality a working reality in their spheres of influence.
Gender equality	Means that people, regardless of gender, enjoy the same status and opportunities to realise their full potential, to make choices in their lives, to participate as decision makers in shaping the sustainable development of their societies, and to gain access and benefit from resources and services. Gender equality is about society equally valuing the different needs, behaviour, and aspirations of people of different genders. It does not mean that everyone has to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.
Gender equity	Is the process of ensuring fairness of treatment of all people, regardless of gender, according to their respective needs and circumstances. Equity is the means, equality is the goal. To ensure fairness, measures must often be put in place to overcome factors that prevent different people from enjoying the same conditions, opportunities and benefits. It may mean exactly the same treatment, or treatment that is different but equivalent in terms of outcomes. (Drawn from ILO definition, 2007).
Gender analysis	Is a critical examination of how differences in gender roles, activities, needs, opportunities and rights/ entitlements affect people in certain situations or contexts. Gender analysis examines the relationships between different genders and their access to and control of resources and the constraints they face relative to each other. A gender analysis should be integrated into all sector assessments or situational analyses to ensure that gender-based injustices and inequalities are not exacerbated by interventions, and that where possible, greater equality and justice in gender relations are promoted. ²

2. UN Guidance Note, Supra. Annex 1.

Gender Equality Marker (GEM)

Is a tool used by organisations to track planned or actual financial investments in gender equality within programmes or projects. A GEM has codes (i.e. 0, 1, 2, 3) which denote the type and/or degree to which a unit of analysis – usually an Output or Project – addresses gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Gender relations

Are a specific sub-set of social groups in a particular community, including how power and access to and control over resources are distributed. Gender relations intersect with all other influences on social relations—age, ethnicity, race, religion—to determine the position and identity of people in a social group. Since gender relations are a social construct, they can be transformed over time to become more equitable.³

Gender transformative interventions

Seek to promote women’s rights and greater equality in roles and responsibilities, status, and access to and control over resources, services and influence—drawing on an analysis of unequal power relations between different genders.⁴

Gender-responsive budgeting

Works for everyone by ensuring the gender-equitable distribution of resources and by contributing to equal opportunities for all. Gender-responsive budgeting is essential for gender justice. Analysing a budget from a gender perspective means assessing how it will meet and respond to the needs of different people. This can also involve assessing the ways gender intersects with other social categories.

Intersectionality

Is the interconnected nature of gender and race, class, caste, disability, and other social categories as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantages.⁵ This lens is useful to make visible and understand inequalities in power and multiple forms of discrimination that people face based on their location within the organisation, as well as their membership in other protected groups.

Women’s empowerment

Is the process of gaining access and developing women’s capacities with a view to participating actively in shaping one’s own life and that of one’s community in economic, social, and political terms.⁶



3. UN Women, Gender Equality Glossary; 4. *Ibid*; 5. Oxford Dictionary; 6. UN Guidance Note, Suprea. Annex 1.



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