

Gender Policy



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Why a Gender Policy?

SWISSAID's vision (charter 2001) points out that equal participation of men and women is one of the fundamental premises for a sustainable development in dignity. In its Strategic Plan 2012 - 2016, SWISSAID asserts once more its willingness to mainstream gender within all institutional and operational levels.

Women's empowerment has been a priority topic within SWISSAID since 1981, a fact that concurs with the SWISSAID approach in its fieldwork: to support the initiatives of women in marginalized situations, to promote women's empowerment so that they can be the actors of their own development in equal conditions as men.

The first version of the SWISSAID Gender Policy was approved in December 2003 and promotes the mainstreaming of the Gender and Development Approach. The implementation of the Gender Policy in the SWISSAID Country Programmes depends on the prioritisations and the local context. The Coordination Offices have elaborated their own Gender Policies, adjusted to the local economic, social and political conditions

With the Strategy 2005 – 2011 SWISSAID has introduced the focus on the co-responsibility of men within the process of gender equality. Consequently, several country programmes have included specific activities addressed to bring into question the traditional distribution of roles between men and women and the fight against domestic violence.

A gender policy is essential to close the gap between overall institutional principles and practice as well as to assure a better gender approach at all levels of the organisation. Monitoring the implementation is considered as a fundamental responsibility of leadership.

This institutional Gender Policy is meant to serve as a general normative framework to be used as reference and orientation for specific strategies at different institutional levels.

What is gender about?

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"
Simone de Beauvoir, 1949

The word **gender** became famous in the 1970s. Gender was used to describe those characteristics of men and women which are socially determined, in contrast to those which are biologically determined (sex). The **distinction between sex and gender** is made to emphasise that everything women and men do, and everything expected of them, with the exception of their sexually distinct functions (childbearing, breastfeeding etc.), can change and does change over time according to social, economic and cultural factors.

People are born female or male, but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. They are taught what behaviour and attitudes, roles and activities are appropriate for them. This learned behaviour is what determines **gender roles**.

Gender is **relational**: Gender describes the relationship between women and men in their various gender roles (e.g. wife-husband, daughter-mother, brother-sister, friends, colleagues etc.). Gender roles vary greatly from one culture to another and from one social group to another within the same culture. Different roles and characteristics are assigned to people not only on the basis of their gender, but also of their caste, class, ethnic background, religion and age. Furthermore, as culture is dynamic and socio-economic conditions change over time, gender roles change with them. People are positioned in society according to these different criteria, which are transformed into determining power relations and which interact strongly with each other. Therefore the social position of an old, white working class woman is different from a black female university professor or from a young indigenous girl living in the slums, for example. Understanding gender differentiation and gender discrimination helps us to understand differentiation and discrimination on other groups.

To fight discrimination the main goals to achieve are gender equity and equality.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, measures must be available to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality.

Gender equality refers to the state of being equal, concretely in four domains: Firstly equal opportunities to realize intellectual, physical and emotional personal objectives. Secondly equal treatment, i.e. the right of the same social conditions of security, remunerations and working conditions. Thirdly equal economic, political, civic, cultural and social rights for men and women. And finally equal distributions of duties especially in the family and the community that would allow for example a fair distribution of domestic work.

A newer concept relying on the rights-based approach is **Gender justice**. Gender justice can be defined as "the protection and promotion of civil, political, economic and social rights on the basis of gender equality". Gender justice also requires that policy makers are **accountable** for tackling the injustice and discrimination that keep women poor and excluded.



Man participating in a protest march against violence against women in Colombia

Status of women today

Gender inequality is a major cause and effect of hunger and poverty: It is estimated that 60 % of chronically hungry people are women and girls although it is them who are mainly responsible for the provision of food. Women make up more than two third of the world's 796 million illiterate people. Some 600 million women, more than half of the world's working women, are in vulnerable employment, trapped in insecure jobs, often outside the purview of labour legislation.

Women are the backbone of the rural economy, especially in the developing world. In some parts of the world, women represent 70 % of the agricultural workforce, comprising 43 % of agricultural workers worldwide. The share of female rural household heads, many of whom are farmers, ranges from about 15–40 % in Latin America, 10–25 % in Asia, and 20–45 % in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet access to productive resources is not equal: In India only 11 % of landholders are women, in Nicaragua the ratio is 18 % and in Tanzania less than 20 %. Rural women receive only a fraction of credit, inputs, agricultural training and information compared to men.

Despite major progress on legal frameworks, millions of women report experiencing violence in their lifetimes, usually at the hands of an intimate partner. Oppression and sexual violence against women remains a characteristic of patriarchal societies all over the world, no matter the cultural or religious context. The systematic targeting of women for violation is a hallmark of contemporary armed conflicts.

Gender inequities are prejudicial to development work; moreover, they are an obstacle to development. Therefore gender relations are one of the most important domains in development work.

Gender and Development Approach

Historically, development cooperation first focused on promoting women in economic activities. Later it took more into account the unequal gender power-relations: The **gender approach** is an analytic framework concentrating on the processes and mechanisms that create and re-enforce existing inequality between men and women.

A **gender analysis** is focusing on the power-relations (questioning gender roles, access to and control over resources, decision-making) and is needed as base study for further development strategies.

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach seeks to base interventions on a participatory gender analysis and analysis of needs, interests and motivations in an effort to empower women to improve their position relative to men in ways which will benefit and transform society as a whole. GAD is thus driven by a powerful motivation – to work for equity and respect for human rights for both men and women.

GAD also includes the distinction between practical and strategic gender needs, which is a useful analytic instrument to ensure the focus on structural changes in society.

Practical gender needs are a response to immediately perceived necessities, however, they do not challenge the gender divisions of labour or the women's subordinate position as the **strategic gender needs** do.

It is important to recognize that achieving better conditions (practical need) as well as better positions (strategic need) are essential for development.

Care Work Approach

Recent discussions emphasise the underestimation and obstruction of the economic and social dimension of women's work. Women are more likely than men to engage in low-productivity activities, unpaid work and precarious employment. Consequently the productivity and income of women's work are low, and the fact that the paid and unpaid work of women is a key factor for social and economic development is neglected.

An important factor that drives these patterns is how differently women and men assume responsibility for care work.

Since the mid-1990s, numerous final statements of high-level UN conferences and the World Bank declare that equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men for care work is a crucial condition for development.

Care work includes all remunerated or unremunerated interpersonal services which directly contribute to the production and provisioning of human life (and thus to the reproduction of labour force) and therefore also maintain the economic system as such.

Care work – like feeding a child – cannot be left out and obliges the care-givers, predominantly women, to renounce opportunities like non-domestic economic activities, political engagement or educational facilities.

Apart of the social and economic importance of care work, the care approach has the advantage to connect the interventions on household level with the political and economic framework. An increased co-responsibility of men for gender equality not only depends on individual behaviour changes, but also on investments and politics in favour of an equal and efficient care system.

When promoting the **co-responsibility of men** within the process of gender equality, the different amounts of time that men and women allocate to care work has to be borne in mind. Social norms, ownership and control over resources (including time use) and unrestricted mobility are important factors that define voice and bargaining power of household members.

Domestic violence against women is a clear manifestation of gender inequality within the household. Co-responsibility means that men actively campaign to prevent violence against women and children.

SWISSAID wants to contribute to the promotion of a world where men and women have the same chances, choices, accesses and rights, enjoy physical and psychological integrity, and where both of them can play an active role as subjects in their country's development in economic, political, social, personal, spiritual and organizational spheres. This is the main goal for all SWISSAID activities.

To achieve this, SWISSAID strives for the elimination of the discrimination of women which is part of the discriminations based on ethnicity, class, gender, age, religion etc. SWISSAID also demands the co-responsibility of men to achieve Gender justice.

SWISSAID's principles on gender

SWISSAID relies on a set of principles to reach the goal of gender equity and equality.

These are:

- We acknowledge that gender has much to do with personal values and attitudes (often unconscious) that can be changed.
- Working on gender and the implementation of a Gender Policy need the commitment of each person, at all levels of the institution and especially of the SWISSAID Executive Board.
- Gender has also much to do with political, economic and social circumstances in a country. Therefore SWISSAID supports partners and especially women's organisations in policy influencing.
- Strengthening women's rights is a key point of SWISSAID's Human Rights-based approach.
- Taking into account that a gender approach requires specific competencies, SWISSAID promotes the continuous training of staff and partners in gender awareness as well as strategies to overcome gender discrimination.
- Different contexts require different approaches and strategies on gender in order to be accurate. Based on the institutional gender policy, the Coordination Offices implement their own Gender Policies, adjusted to country-specific conditions.



Conferring of an award to a couple who worked on a more gender equal relationship in the past year in India.

SWISSAID's 4-dimension strategy

In order to be effective, the gender approach needs to be addressed in a comprehensive way. Therefore, SWISSAID adopts a strategy that takes into account the Gender and Development as well as the Care Work approaches and focuses on four complementary dimensions:

Gender mainstreaming:

Gender is an issue for SWISSAID as a whole. At all levels and in all domains of action, SWISSAID strives for and actively supports an equal and equitable participation of women and men. Within our organization, it means integrating the gender approach in all relevant documents, working processes and behaviour. For our mission in the field, it means integrating the Gender and Development (GAD) and the Care Work approaches into our methodology of development cooperation. Gender sensitive analysis, specific goals and gender-based indicators will be needed in order to mainstream gender in the country programmes.

Women's empowerment:

Given the global inequality between men and women, specific efforts are needed to put an end to existing forms of discrimination of women. Therefore, SWISSAID promotes affirmative actions that empower women by improving their personal, familiar, social, economic and political conditions and positions. Empowering adolescents and promoting increased economic opportunities for young girls are successful ways to interrupt the reproduction of gender inequalities across generations.

SWISSAID pays special attention to the workload of women and the **reduction** of time spent for care-giving. Therefore SWISSAID will analyse for each intervention the changes regarding workload and strategies to reduce the workload of women, promoting the co-responsibility of men for care work.

Women not only have to play an active role within partner organisations and the implementation of projects, but also as leaders.

SWISSAID therefore supports women to assume leading positions within partner organisations or other institutions. The goal is an equal participation of men and women in leading positions.

Sensitisation and capacity building:

As men or women, we all contribute to the shaping of the relationships between and amongst the two sexes. Knowledge of gender and awareness of the potential for change that we carry as individuals are therefore key to a balanced development of women and men.

The **recognition** of the economic importance of women's paid and unpaid work and a more equal distribution of care work is another necessary condition for gender justice.

SWISSAID supports gender sensitisation and enhances the specific competencies of its staff as well as its working partners. All Coordination Offices implement their own gender policies adjusted to the conditions and needs of their target groups.

The assessment of quantitative and qualitative gender-segregated data which reflects the change of behaviour and life conditions will help to monitor and measure the gender policies.

Furthermore, SWISSAID promotes analysis processes between women, between women and men and between men.

Policy influencing:

Political, economical and social basic conditions influence the power relation between men and women and therefore limit or promote gender justice. SWISSAID supports partners in the political struggle to eliminate any kind of gender discrimination. Women's rights will be part of any kind of SWISSAID's policy influencing activities, focusing on the reduction of the workload for care work, land rights for women, the recognition of the important role women play in agriculture, the condemnation of violence against women and the provision of infrastructure like water supply.



Woman in Nicaragua explaining the relation between gender and women's empowerment with a diagram.