



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION
CANADA

Gender EQUALITY Policy





**Dr. Simiyu is the head
of the maternity ward
at the only hospital
on Ukerewe Island
in Tanzania.**

Photo credit:
Esther Ruth Mbabazi / AKFC

Introduction

- This Policy sets out AKFC's perspective on and approach to gender equality.¹ It represents a commitment by the whole organization to support and promote gender equality: a) within its own internal operations in Canada, and b) within its programmatic activities in Canada and internationally.
- This Policy builds on AKFC's experience in promoting gender equality. AKFC has long recognized the interrelationship between poverty and gender inequality. Since the 1980s, AKFC has advanced gender equality in its work, providing technical support to international partners to comprehensively integrate gender equality in programs, and undertaking research on women's empowerment and related issues.
- This Policy updates the 2006 and 2014 AKFC Gender Equality Policy and Strategy, and is developed within the framework of the overall AKF Gender Equality Policy. It is specific to AKFC because it addresses AKFC internal operations and AKFC's role of working with national and international stakeholders and partners to support implementation of programs.
- This Policy serves as a guiding document for AKFC's future work on gender equality.
- While this Policy is intended for AKFC as an independent organization, it is envisioned that it will be implemented in the spirit of partnership, collective learning, and development that characterizes AKFC's relationships with its partners.

Objectives

The objectives of this Policy are:

- To articulate AKFC's values and approach to gender equality, for both internal and external audiences.
- To define AKFC's strategies, accountability framework, and roles and responsibilities of staff and partners such that the organization can hold itself accountable for the full implementation of the Policy both in its work with external partners in Canada and internationally, and its internal operations.
- To equip AKFC's management and staff with the tools needed to understand and support gender equality through their attitudes, behaviour, and work within the organization and with partners.

¹ See Definitions section on page 15 for a full explanation of gender-related terms used in this document.

Vision

- Gender equality is achieved wherever AKFC works, both in Canada and overseas. People of all genders enjoy equal status, perceive themselves as equally valuable human beings, and live free of discrimination based on their gender. They have equal opportunities to realize their full potential, to contribute to the development of their communities and societies, and to benefit from resources and services.
- AKFC promotes pluralism and an intersectional approach to gender equality and women's empowerment by understanding and recognizing the dynamic relationships among gender, age, ability, race, ethnicity, class, caste, language, marital status, and sexual orientation. Pluralism and intersectionality are applied in Canada and in the field, upholding the dignity and rights of staff, volunteers, partners, and beneficiaries who are marginalized on the basis of their identity.
- AKFC works to address the underlying beliefs and practices that create and reinforce gender and social inequalities; to empower the disadvantaged from all backgrounds to develop confidence and skills and take control over their lives; and to create institutions that facilitate an environment that is supportive of gender equality.
- AKFC's internal operations and culture reflect a concern with issues of gender equality and diversity, and equally value people of all genders as staff, partners, and beneficiaries. AKFC measures its progress and engages in critical reflection with the intention of continuing to improve its performance.



**Mufida, a community midwife
in northern Pakistan.**

Photo credit: Danial Shah / AKFC

Preschool students
playing outdoor
games in Bangladesh.
Photo credit:
Thomas L. Kelly / AKFC



Visitors explore
Together: An
exhibition on global
development at
its stop in Ottawa.

Photo credit:
Sameer Dossa / AKFC

Rationale

- AKFC considers gender equality inextricable from the Aga Khan Development Network's (AKDN) 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
- Gender equality is critical to AKFC's mission: women and men are essential participants and contributors to AKFC's work in addressing the root causes of poverty, finding 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.
- AKFC works in many places that have strong norms around gender roles and power relations, and where gender and social inequalities continue to hinder development. In these contexts, it is critical to address gender inequality both indirectly and directly, and to do so in ways that are community-led and responsive to community needs and values. Through long-term relationships of trust with communities, AKFC and its local partners are able to transform gender norms and unequal power relations. Effective gender equality and women's empowerment strategies are identified in consultation with communities, by asking women and men, including from diverse and marginalized groups, for their input, working collaboratively to identify challenges and responses.
- AKFC recognizes that the way it addresses pluralism, gender equality, and diversity within the organization in Canada – through its leadership, structure, policies, working environment, and culture – is inextricably linked to its ability to design and deliver programs that promote gender equality in the societies in which it works. Successful integration of gender equality into AKFC's work with implementing partners is dependent on the extent to which these principles are internalized and owned by the organization and its staff in Canada.

² AKFC is a member of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), along with a number of other development organizations and health and education institutions which were founded by His Highness the Aga Khan.



Kurbanaliev holds his son
Nursamit in Kashka-Suu,
Kyrgyz Republic.

Photo credit:
Nance Ackerman / AKFC

Principles

- Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment are prerequisites to achieving AKFC's development goals.
- AKFC recognizes that gender identities and roles evolve over time and vary across the geographies it works in and the communities with which it works. AKFC promotes an intersectional approach to gender equality, recognizing dynamic relationships among gender, age, ability, race, ethnicity, class, caste, language, and sexual orientation.
- Gender equality and women's empowerment concern the whole organization and are the concern of all staff and volunteers. AKFC's Gender Equality Task Force and management will serve to ensure the implementation of the Gender Equality Policy.
- Gender equality as a cross-cutting issue should be systematically integrated into all aspects of AKFC's work and organization.
- AKFC supports the AKDN in integrating gender equality into key organizational policies, systems, and practices, including human resources, recruitment, performance appraisal, training, budgeting, resource development, communications, and decision-making.
- Performance management and reporting includes the transparent monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming and gender equality within the organization and its activities, and application of lessons learned to ongoing and future work, in an environment that encourages critical reflection for continuous improvement.
- AKFC supports its staff and volunteers in building their knowledge and capacity to implement gender equality principles throughout their work.
- It is the role of AKFC to analyze the impact of gender and social inequality in the places and sectors in which it works, and develop appropriate responses to redress it.
- AKFC's programming addresses the underlying beliefs and cultural attitudes that create and reinforce gender and social inequalities, and supports the empowerment of women and girls as a key strategy towards achieving gender equality.
- AKFC helps to raise awareness and build the body of knowledge in gender equality and women's empowerment through its work and partnerships, and communicate that knowledge within the AKDN, in Canada, and with other organizations and partners.



Students at the University of Central Asia in Khorog, Tajikistan. This university is located in the Pamir mountains, providing access to quality education for young women and men living in remote areas.

Photo credit:
Christopher Wilton-Steer / AKFC

Farmers in Mozambique learn agricultural production and productivity methods through Farmer Field School programs, like storing grains in silos. Photo credit: Lucas Cuerva / AKFC



Strategies

- AKFC will continue to empower a Gender Equality Task Force to examine gender equality within operations and programs and lead action to implement the Policy. The Gender Equality Task Force will be chaired by the AKFC Gender Focal Point, and will develop a strategic action plan to implement the Policy.
- AKFC will provide training and support to management, staff, and volunteers so that they have a good understanding of gender equality and women's empowerment concepts and practices; support gender equality and diversity through their attitudes and behaviour; and have the necessary knowledge and skills to apply gender equality principles to their work in accordance with the needs of their position. Gender equality and women's empowerment awareness will be incorporated into staff induction processes. AKFC will build the capacity of relevant staff to carry out gender analysis and planning through the development of tools and resources, and training and mentoring opportunities.
- AKFC will incorporate gender equality into the organizational management and operations of the organization. It will take measures to provide a supportive, open, safe, work environment with equal opportunities for professional development and advancement. AKFC will identify specific strategies for achieving greater gender balance in decision-making roles and ensure that decisions on recruitment, performance appraisal, mentoring, promotion, and compensation are based on demonstrated capacity. Internal policies such as leave, working hours, and parental benefits will be examined and changed where necessary to enable and support staff in maintaining an appropriate balance between work, family, and civic life.
- All AKFC projects will integrate or target gender equality and the social or economic empowerment of women, female adolescents, and girls. AKFC will institutionalize and operationalize the integration of gender equality into all stages of program design, implementation and evaluation. AKFC will integrate intersectionality into program design, implementation, and evaluation. AKFC will facilitate the design of robust gender analysis in order to inform implementation to directly address gender inequalities in appropriate ways and measure progress and effectiveness in consultation with partners. This will include working with partners, where relevant, to systematically integrate gender sensitive and responsive approaches in scoping, design, budgets, monitoring, implementation, and reporting. This will also include identifying and securing resources for gender equality integrated or targeted programming.
- AKFC will adopt accountability measures for gender equality results, including data collection, analysis, monitoring, and reporting on the status of gender equality processes and indicators in both internal operations and programming activities. The outcomes of gender equality monitoring will be fed back into organizational and activity planning and implementation.
- AKFC will integrate gender equality in human resources, public affairs, resource development, donor services, finance, IT, and building operations policies, systems, and practices. The Gender Equality Task Force will work with all AKFC departments to identify opportunities to strengthen gender equality and implement targeted trainings, policy revisions, communications, and system changes.
- AKFC will contribute to best practices and lessons learned in gender equality through knowledge generation, interpretation, dissemination, use, and knowledge sharing with other AKDN agencies and partner organizations. AKFC will focus on gender equality and women's empowerment in its communications, professional learning, and public engagement activities.



Mengtela runs a weaving business that helps support her family and employs other women in her community in Afghanistan.

Photo credit:
Oriane Zerah / AKFC

Roles and Responsibilities

AKFC Senior Management will:

- Provide leadership and champion gender equality throughout the operation of the organization and globally within AKF and the AKDN;
- Support the actions of the Gender Equality Task Force and Gender Focal Point with appropriate time and resource allocations;
- Support the development of staff capacity in gender equality and women's empowerment;
- Support the implementation of a human resource policy that reflects the organization's commitments to gender equality and diversity; and
- Ensure that programmatic and operational management systems are established to monitor and report on the implementation of the Gender Equality Policy to the National Committee.

Gender Equality Task Force, under the leadership of the Gender Focal Point, will:

- Implement the approved AKFC gender equality strategic action plan, and uphold the principles of the AKFC Gender Equality Policy;
- Provide input, coordination, and monitoring for the integration of the gender equality agenda across all departments at AKFC, including identifying training needs and coordinating gender-related learning for staff, and developing internal systems and procedures for monitoring and reporting;
- Champion gender equality and serve as a leader and resource on gender equality within respective AKFC departments and the organization as a whole;
- Identify strategies and means for communicating AKFC's commitment to gender equality to external audiences;
- Contribute to the identification and development of new priorities and initiatives over time;
- Maintain knowledge, carry out regular research on best practices in organizational policies and monitoring, and distill lessons learned for AKFC; and
- Regularly report back to Senior Management.

AKFC Staff will:

- Develop an awareness and understanding of gender equality issues as necessary for the execution of their position;
- Reflect an understanding of and respect for gender equality and diversity in attitudes, behaviours, communications, and day-to-day work;
- Ensure that the Gender Equality Policy is reflected in program design and implementation, including identifying and securing resources for gender equality and women's empowerment programming; and
- Support the implementation of the Policy in their work with external stakeholders, including sharing the Policy with external partners and volunteers as appropriate.

AKFC National Committee will:

- Receive and review the Gender Equality Policy and support its implementation;
- Receive and review annual reports on the status of implementation of the Gender Equality Policy from AKFC;
- Provide guidance and insights on gender equality best practices from the wider Canadian operating environment.

AKFC Volunteers will:

- Uphold the Gender Equality Policy in their activities, with support from AKFC.

Accountability Framework

- AKFC's Gender Equality Task Force will report to AKFC Senior Management on the implementation of the Policy and any related strategies / action plan tasks semi-annually.
- AKFC's Gender Equality Task Force will design and implement a monitoring system which includes the regular collection of data regarding gender equality in operations and programs issues.
- AKFC's Senior Management will report annually to the National Committee on the status of gender equality activities and results.
- The Gender Equality Task Force will review the Gender Equality Policy every three years and revise as required to ensure that it stays relevant and reflects AKFC's current thinking and practice on gender equality, as well as best practices in the sector. Participatory processes involving the whole organization will be used to inform the review and revision of the Policy.
- AKFC will hold itself and its partners implementing its international programs accountable to designing, managing, and reporting on programs in line with the principles outlined in this Policy.
- AKFC will approach the issue of gender equality within its operations and programming in a spirit of transparency, self-reflection, and continuous improvement, and work collaboratively with staff and partners to strengthen its internal and external practices.

For more than three decades, the World Partnership Walk has raised funds for AKFC in 10 cities across the country.
Photo credit: AKFC

**Nayab is crafting toys
for early childhood
development in Pakistan.**
Photo credit:
Danial Shah / AKFC



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 different genders. These roles and relationships are learned, can vary widely within and between societies and cultures, and change over time. Gender influences what is considered appropriate in a given culture and shapes the influence, power, and resources that women, men, and gender minorities possess. Gender differs from sex, which refers to a collection of biological traits that are used to categorize people as male, female, or intersex.

GENDER EQUALITY “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 equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.”³

GENDER EQUITY refers to fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women, men, and gender minorities. The concept recognizes that different genders have different needs and that these differences should be identified and addressed to rectify imbalances between genders. Gender equity measures may be a means of achieving gender equality.

GENDER EXPRESSION refers to how one externally expresses their gender identity as feminine, masculine, both, or neither.

GENDER IDENTITY refers to one's internal awareness of being a woman, a man, both, or neither.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING is “a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a strategy, an approach, a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects.”⁴

INTERSECTIONALITY refers to the relationships between gender, age, ability, religion, race, ethnicity, class, caste, language, sexual orientation, and marital status, recognizing the differential experiences between and among women, men, and gender minorities. An intersectional approach to gender equality analyses these relationships and addresses identified inequalities.⁵

INTERSEX refers to individuals whose chromosomes, hormones, and/or anatomy falls outside of biological classifications of male and female. An intersex person may have any gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation.

PLURALISM refers to “an ethic of respect for diversity. Whereas diversity is a fact, pluralism is a choice. Pluralism results from the daily decisions taken by state institutions, by civil society actors and associations and by individuals to recognize the value of human differences.”⁶

SEXUAL ORIENTATION refers to one's sexual, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to individuals of a different gender, the same gender, or more than one gender. Sexual minorities are people who experience attraction to others of the same gender and/or minority genders. This includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, asexual, and other sexual minority identities.⁷

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT refers to a process of social transformation by which women and girls who have been denied power gain power, in particular the ability to make strategic life choices. It “touches on many different aspects of change in women's lives, each important in themselves, but also in their interrelationships with other aspects. It touches on women's sense of self-worth and social identity; their willingness and ability to question their subordinate status and identity; their capacity to exercise strategic control over their own lives and to renegotiate their relationships with others who matter to them; and their ability to participate on equal terms with men in reshaping the societies in which they live in ways that contribute to a more just and democratic distribution of power and possibilities.”⁸ For this power to come about, three interrelated dimensions are needed: access to and control of resources; agency (the ability to use these resources to bring about new opportunities); and achievements (the attainment of new social outcomes). Empowerment, therefore, is both a process and an end result.⁹

³ UN Women, Concepts and Definitions, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>.

⁴ UN Women. (2012). “Gender Mainstreaming,” accessed at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/gendermainstreaming.htm>

⁵ Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”. Accessed at www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mapping-margins.pdf

⁶ Global Centre for Pluralism. (2017). “What We Do,” Accessed at www.pluralism.ca/what-we-do-2

⁷ Adapted from The Yogyakarta Principles. (2007). Accessed at www.yogyakartaprinciples.org/introduction.

⁸ Kabeer, N. (2008) Paid Work, Women's Empowerment and Gender Justice: Critical Pathways of Social Change, Pathways Working Paper 3, accessed at <http://www.pathwaysofempowerment.org/Wp375.pdf>

⁹ Adapted from Kabeer, N. (1999). “Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment,” Development and Change, Volume 30, Number 3, July 1999. Blackwell Publishing, accessed at <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/bpl/dech/1999/00000030/00000003/art00125>



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