

GENDER POLICY OF MVSS

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Background

Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and condition for social justice. Recognition of and respect for the dignity of human beings is at the centre stage of human development. Being born in the image and likeness of God, all human beings are equal. Article 14 of our Indian Constitution guarantees to every citizen Right to Equality. Article 15 further states that the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. But over the 60 years after this Constitution was adopted there are discriminations and differences in the factors determining health, decision making, opportunities and resources available to women and men.

Discrimination still prevails among the uneducated and the educated in developing countries and the developed countries, among the poor sections of the society and the rich. It exists not only in the Society at large, but within the Church as well. Gender Discrimination has a greater impact on women though men are also affected.

Women of the marginalized groups such as dalits, tribal's, backward castes and minorities suffer much due to poverty, ill-health, lack of access to literacy and appropriate knowledge and lack of hygiene and potable water. In addition, they are being displaced from their lands and livelihood. They suffer systematic and structural violence that enslave them and dehumanize them economically, socio-politically and religio-culturally.

Gender discrimination has negative effects on boys and men as well. It damages their psyche and increases the incidence of morbidity and crime among them. Relations of distrust, conflict, competition and many forms of subtle abuse emerge instead of those rooted in values of caring, sharing, compassion, mutual respect, collaboration and partnership. Such discrimination thus has negative consequences on human relations.

An Analysis of the Causes

The culture of domination, marginalization and exclusion which embody ideas, beliefs, values, traditions, rules, norms, perspectives (ideologies) that prefer males/sons has been styled as "the culture of patriarchy. Through dominating social structures the men own, control and manage financial intellectual and ideological resources as well as the labor, fertility and sexuality of women and thus perpetuate gender discrimination. Such a culture produces stereotyped notions of how a women or man should behave (in words and actions), whereby they themselves become

transmitter of the above value system. Consequently women also become both victims and victimizers.

The process of globalization which is market-centered and profit-driven, leads to further exploitation of women as cheap labor resulting in the increasing pauperization of women. Fundamentalism and communalism reinforce the subjugation of women to men, suppress women's movements by dividing women along religious lines and intensify violence against women.

This discrimination exists due to class, caste, creed, religion, socio-economic, cultural and political structures and the systems in the society. Therefore MVSS as an organization aims at establishing a Society based on equality, and equity among men and women. Hence the need for a Gender Policy felt to facilitate concerns related to the subject.

UNDERSTANDING GENDER:

- Gender refers to describe those differences between women and men, which are socially constructed, while sex refers to those which are biologically determined.
- Gendered socialization attributes different roles and responsibilities to women/ men/ boys/ girls.
- Gender differences have been built up and toughened by socio-cultural and economic institution over time perpetuating discriminatory belief systems and attitudes, imbalanced positioning and inequalities among women and men.
- Gender equality is the absence of discrimination on the basis of a person's sex in opportunities, in the allocation of resources and benefits or in access to services.
- Gender equity refers to fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. Gender equity is a means and gender equality is the result.
- Gender mainstreaming is to initiate and institutionalize progression that will bring about gender equality. Mainstreaming requires changes at different levels within institutions, in agenda setting, budget allocation, policy making, planning, implementation and evaluation.

Vision

We visualize communities where all enjoy equal rights, opportunities and the members respect each other and live in harmony with the nature and the Divine.

Mission

Empowering the people to have access to their rights and opportunities as well as bringing about systematic changes in view of good governance and social cohesion.

POLICY GOAL, OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES

The overall goal of this Policy Framework is to mainstream gender concerns in the development process in order to improve the social, legal/civic, economic and cultural conditions of the people of Sagar, particularly women.

Specific Objectives

- To redress imbalances which arise from existing gender inequalities through policy review, advocacy for legal reforms and enforcement of existing legislation.
 - To provide institutional framework from which policies are derived internally.
 - To implement activities designed to strengthen women's role in the economic development.
 - To implement activities designed to promote children's development and protection.
- Mission of Hope for Society Foundation Gender Policy
- To promote Women's equal access to, opportunities, and control over economically significant resources and benefits.

Principles

The Gender Policy is an integral part of the development process and reinforces the overall development objectives in the country. It emphasizes CBOs commitment to gender responsive development.

Strategy

A continuous process of animation and advocacy among men and women to become aware, form and organized into groups and federation to take actions for integrated, participatory and sustainable development.

STRATEGIES

The policy document proposes a wide range of strategies for the improvement of living standards of women and also mainstream gender concerns. The policy objectives shall be achieved through the following strategies.

- Ensuring women responsive development planning at all levels- National, Regional, Districts, Area Council, and Unit Committees.
- Sensitization on gender issues at all levels.
- Promoting a Gender and Development (GAD) approach that is based on the understanding of gender roles and social relations of women and men as well as the Women in Development (WID) approach which focuses on women specifically.
- Ensuring the dissemination, translation, and implementation of the gender policy in all sections of the Indian society.
- Promoting appropriate education, sensitization and creation of awareness on the responsibility of all concerned parties in each sector to address the specific gender concerns within the sector. This should entail consultation with both women and men in specific areas of relevance to identification of gender concerns.
- Promoting and carrying out research into gender related concerns.
- Advocating for gender equality at all levels.
- Promoting a gender sensitive approach to technical cooperation among the various sectors in the development arena.
- Establishing effective mechanisms to monitor and evaluate gender issues.

Guiding Principles

1. Equal Participation
2. Collective Decision Making
3. Freedom of Expression and Speech

MVSS

- Recognizes the innate power of human beings to bring about the transformation of unjust structures and practices and promote development at personal and societal levels
- Acknowledges the new world order created by globalization and its effects on developing nations specially women and seeks to address the imbalances
- Understands gender equality as a cross cutting goal that needs to be integrated into all its policies
- Realizes that gender differences are socially and culturally constructed and reinforced by caste, class, ethnicity, language, age, region and religion and that restructuring gender relations to reclaim the dignity of girls/ women and boys/ men is essential
- Believes that gender equality can be achieved through a partnership among and between men and women
- Promotes women' empowerment (social, economic and political) as being fundamental to achieving gender equality

Gender Policy of MVSS: A step towards a gender just society

Since gender equity and gender justice find the place in the vision and mission of MVSS, we went ahead with the formulation and implementation of our gender policy. The policy aims at the facilitation of the emergence of a gender just working environment of the organization. Following are the fundamentals of our gender policy:

Objectives

- To increase the participatory of women in leadership and decision making by providing equal opportunities and exposure and acknowledging their contributions in shaping sustainable development of the society.
- To promote and create a free and conducive environment for participation of women in all structures, meetings and activities and leading the gender equity based campaigns of the Diocese/ Organizations.
- To promote and create ambience where in women get ample opportunities to speak out their differences and voice their positions on common problems/concerns and specific issues.
- To promote collaboration and networks with other like minded organizations to promote gender equality.
- To seek the participation, support and cooperation of men in taking shared responsibility for women empowerment and minimization of unequal power relationship in work place and society.

Thrust Areas

- Conscientisation and awareness creation on gender equality
- Gender and development programs
- Replication of best practices on gender equality
- Capacity building of partners, members, staff and stake holders
- Information dissemination and resource mobilization
- Research and documentation

Our commitment

MVSS is committed to striving for a just society where oppression and exploitation and violence are absent. We have a long-standing commitment to the elimination of women's subordination,

the transformation of gender relations, and the empowerment of women in terms of their participation, representation, and leadership. Its chief concern is to work among the poor and the marginalized especially among the most deprived and voiceless women with the motto of 'Empower Women, Transform Society.

In its journey of over a period of 20 years MVSS has earned vast experiences and knowledge. A very important fact that is revealed out of these knowledge and experiences is that, although our country has advanced technically, scientifically and economically, the growing number of crime and violence and discrimination against women has not declined as it should have been. This further substantiates the negligence of authorities in not paying adequate significance to the gender issues.

Gender disparity, gender discrimination and the denial of women's basic human rights is a major cause of subordination of women.

Gender inequality and unequal power relations between men and women are rampant in society in countless ways:

- Domestic violence is the biggest cause of injury and death to women worldwide. Gender based violence causes more deaths and disabilities among women aged 15 to 44 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war. (World Bank Discussion Paper)
- 2/3 of children denied primary educations are girls, and 75% of the world's 876 million illiterate adults are women. Every extra year a girl spends at school, could reduce child mortality by 10%. (UN, World's Women)
- Women work 2/3 of the world's working hours, and produce half of the world's food, yet earn only 10% of the world's income, and own less than 1% of the world's property. (UN)
- More than half million women die in pregnancy and child birth every year: of these deaths, 99% are in developing countries. (UN, World's Women)
- Women hold only 14% of parliamentary seats worldwide, and only 8% of the world's cabinet ministers are women. Only 11 countries have met the UN target of 30% female decision makers. (UNIFEM, Progress of the World's Women)
- Only a nominal percentage of women Panchayat representatives/ members are really active. In most cases, they are the rubber stamps and their duties are performed by their male counterparts who are not very gender sensitive. Therefore, women oriented issues often remain neglected at the Panchayat level leading to a nationwide negligence.

This is why, working for gender equality, gender mainstreaming or considering gender issues as social issues and integrating it in every aspect of our work, is one of our chief priorities. This would mean that both men and women are consulted and both profit equally.

Programmes can ensure that they promote a fairer balance of power between women and men, at house hold, incorporated in decision making processes, and civil society organizations be supported to confront national policies which gender inequality and violence against women means confronting sociological and cultural barriers, and this cannot be done by

working with men and women jointly can have a swift and permanent impact on beliefs and behavior, than working with women alone.

Promoting gender equality is not to be seen as advantaging women and dis-empowering men. Gender inequality and rigid gender stereotypes can often prevent a household or community from progressing. Ensuring equality and justice and unlocking women's potential is to the benefit of both men and women and at the wider society.

Programmatic Intervention

- Finalization of a gender policy
- 50% of women as staff
- Just wages, maternity and other benefits and equal wages for the similar works
- No discrimination only because a person is female
- Ensuring safety for women at work place
- Recognizing, valuing and promoting the feminine and masculine qualities in both men and women
- Inclusion of gender sensitization in the capacity building programmes.
- Prioritizing the gender issue programmes
- Collaboration and networking with organization/ NGOs, for the promotion of gender equality.
- Facilitating campaigns towards the participation of women in the local self governance.
- Undertaking research unearthing gender inequalities and highlighting the best practices for replication.
- Gender balance in different committee and bodies.
- A women-friendly environment of work
- Application of the HR policy of MVSS both for men and women.

Monitoring and evaluation

The organization will have a committee for checking sexual harassment at organizational level. The committee will comprise five members out of which at least three will be women. There will be an invitee member for ensuring unbiased decisions. The committee will not have the management members as its members. The President of the organization will constitute the committee consisting of five members out of whom one represents the accused and the other aggrieved. The quorum will be of three members.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- Strengthening and enhancing gender planning skills at sector level.

- Placing high-level officers within the GDO to co-ordinate gender friendly planning.
- Requiring each such officer to ensure that gender sensitivity is reflected in policy development and implementation

Conclusion

Gender is a category which is socially constructed and the implementation of the gender policy will require the commitment, participation and contribution of every staff member/ Diocese/ Partner organization/ stakeholders/ networking agencies etc. our commitment to integrating gender perspective will need to be reflected in work plans and in our programme implementations and other activities. Diocese/and co-workers will be expected to develop plans of action plans of action for integrating gender perspectives into their work. These action plans will be used to monitor progress. We will always be engaged in relentless efforts to fight discrimination and subordination wherever possible. It is hoped that this gender policy will assist MVSS and the Dioceses to achieve gender equality in the workplace, home, community and the society at large.

Rt. Rev Anthony Chirayath

President

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