

Brien Holden Foundation

GENDER EQUALITY and EQUITY POLICY

POLICY

Gender is a social, cultural and economic construct that affects the opportunities associated with being female or male. Societies determine how women and men should dress, behave or work. Gender differs from sex (being female or male) as it is social and cultural in nature rather than biological. As societies and cultures vary over time, it means that the attributes associated with gender can also vary and be amenable to change. Therefore, gender is not restricted to the biological difference associated with sex e.g. female and male but encompasses much greater diversity. Gender is not synonymous with women; rather, it refers to women, men, and gender-diverse people.¹

Gender equality means equal outcomes for women, gender-diverse people and men. Gender equality is about equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities for girls, boys, women, men, and gender-diverse people regardless of their sex. It means all genders have equal opportunities to realise their individual potential, to contribute to their country's economic and social development and, to benefit equally from their participation in society. Gender equality does not mean that all genders are the same; only that access to opportunities and life-changes is neither dependent on, nor constrained by, their sex.¹

“Gender equality is a fundamental human right and necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. However, gender inequality remains one of the most pervasive forms of discrimination in all development settings.”

United Nations Development Programme 2020²

Gender equality is the stage of human social development at which “the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not be determined by the fact of being born female or male,” in other words, a stage when all genders can realise their full potential.¹

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women, gender-diverse people and men. Gender equity means fairness of treatment for women, gender-diverse people and men according to their respective needs. This may mean that treating women, gender-diverse people and men equally might not be fair and may create further disadvantage. Gender equity measures help to lessen the inherent disadvantage that a society or culture may impose on one or more genders compared to one other.³

Gender Equity leads to Gender Equality. Gender equity is core to the Foundation’s development practice. We adopt gender equity strategies to reduce gender inequalities in access to education, employment, and eye care service delivery.

“Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).”

United Nations Development Programme 2020²

Gender equality is a development objective, and critical for the realisation of human rights.⁴ No society can develop successfully without providing equitable opportunities, resources, and life prospects for women, gender-diverse people and men. When women, gender-diverse people and men have relative equality, economies grow faster, children's health improves and there is less corruption and domestic violence. Violence is more likely to occur in an environment where women, girls, and gender-diverse people are undervalued and discriminated against. While gains have been made, gender inequality in opportunity to access health and education are still striking:

- 64% of the 774 million people in the world who lack basic literacy skills are female
- Women hold an average of five per cent of seats in national parliaments in Pacific island countries, compared with a global average of 21.7%
- In most countries, women are more likely than men to work in unpaid family employment or the informal wage sector⁵

When we consider vision, gender inequality is just as striking:

- Nearly 67% of people who are blind are women and girls
- At all ages, and in every region of the world, women and girls have a higher risk of having vision impairment than men and boys.
- In some communities, the stigma associated with spectacle use is greater for women and girls
- Women and girls access eye care services less than men and boys.

Gender inequality places women and girls in a position of greater vulnerability by lacking access to the treatment and services which could prevent and restore vision loss. Women and girls with blindness or vision impairment have less access to education, rehabilitation, and employment and can become victims of isolation, dependence, and abuse.

Yet despite widespread gender inequality globally, women demonstrate that they are powerful forces for change. A leading way to end poverty is to strengthen women's opportunities; helping them to realise their own potential to change their environment. Income in the hands of women has a dramatic impact on the wellbeing of their families, as it has been shown that women spend a significant proportion of their income on children's food, health, and education. Investments in women's and girls' education and health yield some of the highest returns of all development investments, including reduced rates of maternal mortality, better educated and healthier children, and increased household incomes. The Asia and Pacific region lose between US\$42-47 billion annually due to women's lack of access to employment, and between US16-\$US30 billion due to gender gaps in education.⁶

Achieving gender equality extends beyond improving women's health and education. It links to access to economic resources, participation and leadership in decision-making, respect for the human rights of women, and an increased capacity to tackle gender inequality. Strategies that increase communities, women and girls to be more effectively engaged are required, and the effectiveness of these strategies need to be evaluated.

Our position on gender equality

We believe that gender equality is intrinsically linked to sustainable development. Ensuring adequate and equitable access to eye care makes a tremendous difference to the lives of women with vision impairment. We endeavour to ensure that our programs are gender-responsive and contribute to the elimination of gender gaps and inequality.

Where gender imbalance is detected in our programs, we attempt to understand the reason and take action to address the imbalance. We adopt gender equity strategies to reduce gender inequalities in access to care such as

bringing services close to the communities, whole-of-community awareness, and fostering women-to-women contact.

Human resources

Our staff profile reflects our gender policy as our current workforce is 58% women, with an all-female senior leadership, and 42% female representation on the Board. Where possible, we promote an agile, responsive and gender-sensitive work environment to our staff, for example, at our Global Office more than a decade ago, we initiated a childcare centre to help support flexible hours and work-life balance for mothers returning to work.

How we work to contribute towards achieving gender equality

We strive to contribute to gender equality directly through our projects and collaboratively with our partners, using our Gender Equity Framework to guide our strategic interventions globally. The Foundation's Strategic plan 2020-2024 has a focus on gender equity and women's empowerment. We continue to use our previously developed course and training materials on "Gender and Eye Care" for Foundation staff, partners and stakeholders.

Partners

We integrate the commitment to gender equality into our agreements with partners. Where the commitment of a partner to implement gender equity approaches has not yet reached international standards, we are proactive in supporting their further development. We advocate and capacity build with our partners to consider implementing gender equity approaches in all stages of the project lifecycle.

Program design

We have standardised organisation systems and templates which ensure that gender equity approaches are integral to our program design phase enabling programs to ultimately support gender equality. We ensure that women, girls and gender-diverse people participate in community consultations regarding current and/or developing programs or services and encourage their participation in the decision-making related to their health, education and income generation.

Project Cycle Management

Gender equity is considered throughout our PCM process. In our situational analysis, where possible, poverty and economic data is disaggregated by gender to identify disparities. The project design process creates an opportunity to evaluate and determine project strategy and a workplan whereby affirmative action to enable gender equality in a project is considered at the design stage - each of the country strategic plan, project design and management plan require action plans to address cross-cutting issues to enable gender equality and disability inclusivity.

Through our annual project evaluation process, we review our projects for gender equality and facilitate cross learning between projects on gender equity interventions that have taken place within the previous year.

Sustainable service development

When recruiting for sustainable service development projects, we strive to implement gender equity approaches at all project levels. We incorporate additional assistance for women to overcome barriers to access due to cultural or religious taboos, for example, using female health workers to examine women.

The monitoring of our services is disaggregated by gender, so we can learn how our programs impact differently on women, girls, men, boys and gender-diverse people. Where a gender imbalance is detected, we attempt to understand the reason and take action to rectify this. Strategies to address these areas may include the redirection of health promotion activities and awareness campaigns, or reviewing the selection and recruitment of human resources.

Education

We adhere to our quality assurance framework when developing our education activities. This framework references a gender equitable approach to education across all programs and courses.

We endeavour to ensure that women are adequately represented in the education that we deliver. Where we are not responsible for the recruitment and selection of candidates, we advocate and work with our partners to gain equitable representation for women.

Health promotion and health education

We aim to use gender sensitive approaches to health education and health promotion such as through schoolchild health programmes and collaboration and partnership with women's groups.

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