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# LWF NEPAL'S GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICY, 2021



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## FOREWORD

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) is a global concern that addresses unequal power relations based on caste, class, ethnicity, age, disability, gender, geography and language or a combination of these dimensions. The focus of GESI is to ensure fair treatment and equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities for women, men, LGBTIQ and, girls and boys. The constitution of Nepal 2015 has declared all citizens as equal and provided a mandate for GESI to bring women, persons with disability, marginalized, vulnerable and excluded communities into the mainstream of development. Nepal has also shown legal commitment to GESI by ratifying international conventions, including CEDAW and UNCRPD. Nonetheless, despite of these efforts, gender inequality and discrimination based on caste/ethnicity continues and is still severe among the most disadvantaged group i.e. Dalits.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Nepal considers GESI as a significant approach to ensure the equality and empowerment of its target groups—marginalized and disadvantaged communities such as women, people with disability, Dalits, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, youth, ex-bonded laborers, and indigenous people. Based on this understanding, we have formulated the GESI policy, 2021. The policy has been formulated with the goal of eliminating institutional, cultural, and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression that continues to promote exclusion and discrimination against women and, excluded and marginalized groups. With this policy LWF Nepal commits to integrating gender equality and social inclusion in all its works, and within its organizational structure. We have framed the policy with a firm belief that incorporating gender considerations and social inclusion perspective into humanitarian and development interventions contributes to enhancing better response and equitable access to opportunities, assistance, relief services and information. LWF Nepal will implement the GESI policy in line with Nepal's legal mandates and provisions, aiming to ensure equitable participation of target beneficiaries in the society and its decision-making processes, activities, and programs.

In terms of policy formulation, the GESI policy was developed through extensive consultation and a step-by-step process. Initially, we formed a GESI team and

reviewed and reflected LWF Nepal's previous GESI activities, both at field and program level. Since June 2020 we started fortnightly meetings where we discussed the successes and areas of improvement of the GESI activities. Accordingly, we collectively reviewed the GESI policies of other INGOs, donors and related agencies and, tried to incorporate their best practices and relevant ideas. After drafting the new policy, we consulted the external experts within Nepal as well as the Gender focal person in Geneva headquarter for feedbacks and suggestions. Likewise, we also conducted a gender audit (August 2020), which further allowed us to improve the policy. Finally, to ensure that the policy is understandable to everyone, we also requested some members outside the core team (non-staff members) to provide their recommendations. After a rigorous process, we were able to finalize the GESI policy.

I strongly believe that the GESI policy will be effectively implemented, helping to mainstream both women and excluded and marginalized groups within the operations and programming of LWF Nepal. I am confident that we will be able to put these principles into practice, not just among our priority population but within our organization as well. We will be reviewing this policy in every two years interval in order to update the necessary changes based on continuous experiences and learning. I encourage everyone to familiarize themselves with the document and understand its scope and guiding principles along with approaches. With a very positive spirit, I would finally like to thank the LWF Nepal GESI team (Bal Chaudhary, Man Khatri, Yagya Gautam, Shriju Panday, Vishruta Rana, Subash Gurung, Gopal Dahal, Bandana Bajracharya, Aswin Paudel, Anoj Basnet, Sachin Adhikaree and Rohit Baskota) for their pro-activeness, dedication, and commitment in developing this important policy. In addition, I appreciate the external experts (Ms. Renuka Rai, and Ms. Ambika Kumari Rai), the RPC (Ms. Susan Muis) and the Gender Focal Point (Ms. Carolina Tveoy) of LWF Geneva, and Ms. Anne Fitzpatrick of ALWS Australia for their contributions in developing this policy.

Thank you,  
Dr. Bijaya Bajracharya  
Country Director

## BACKGROUND

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) is a concept that addresses unequal power relations experienced by people on the grounds of caste, class, ethnicity, age, gender, geography, and language or a combination of those dimensions. Gender equality means equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities for women, men and LGBTIQ, girls and boys. Gender equity is the means through which gender equality is ultimately aimed to achieve. It refers to the fair treatment of women, girls, boys, and men according to their respective needs and perspectives.

Nepal is ranked in 0.680 as per the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2020<sup>1</sup>. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 described Nepal as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and democratic state and declared all citizens are equal irrespective of their race, religion, region, belief, gender, caste, ethnicity, age and ability. The constitution has guaranteed at least 33% of female representation in Parliament for their participation in policy formulation. Nepal has furthermore demonstrated its commitment to gender equality and social inclusion by signing a number of international conventions including CEDAW and UNCRPD<sup>2</sup>.

Though there have been some positive changes in indicators measuring women's empowerment over the last 6 years (from 2012 to 2018), but gender inequality still persists in all social groups, with higher degrees among the most disadvantaged (e.g. Dalits)<sup>3</sup>.

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1 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NPL>

2 CEDAW is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, and UNCRPD is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006.

3 A Study on the State of Social Inclusion in Nepal (SOSIN) by Central Department of Anthropology, Tribhuvan University with funding of USAID, September 2020.

Social inclusion indices<sup>4</sup> showed that included groups have become more powerful and excluded groups more vulnerable. All Dalits, Muslims and a section of Madhesi and Janajati are left behind. Cross-cultural solidarity has improved, but discrimination based on caste/ethnicity continues and is still severe for Dalits.

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Nepal, a country program of the LWF World Service (WS) has been in Nepal since 1984 and continues to work with marginalized and disadvantaged communities of Nepal such as women, people with disability, Dalits, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, youth, ex-bonded labour and indigenous people. Ensuring gender and social inclusion within the society through trans-formative actions and empowerment for gender justice is in line with its country strategy (2019-2024) and also Nepal's commitment to internationally agreed objectives such as the sustainable development goals 5 (gender equality) and 10 (reduced inequalities), CEDAW and the UNCRPD, and the priorities of the Periodic Development Plan.

LWF Nepal believes in the value and power of diversity and inclusion within the communities where it works as well as within its own organizational structures. It is committed to eliminating institutional, cultural, and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression that sustain discrimination against women and excluded and marginalized groups taking into consideration of intersectionality context of the program.

Through this GESI policy, LWF Nepal commits to ensure that gender equality and social inclusion is fully incorporated in all of its works both as a universal human rights and ending inequalities and exclusion itself, as well as to overcome poverty and social injustice more effectively. This GESI policy will be implemented in line with the context of Nepal's legal mandates and provisions.

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<sup>4</sup> *Composite social inclusion index composed of six sectoral composite indexes—demography, social, economic, diversity and solidarity, governance and gender norms and values.*

LWF Nepal adopts four track approaches i) GESI specific transformative projects/ programs, ii) GESI mainstreaming projects/programs, iii) advocacy or influencing for transformative changes, iv) becoming an inclusive organization; to work on gender equality and social inclusion in order to gain sustainable results on the positions of excluded communities targeted by the organization.

## GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this policy is to enable LWF Nepal to promote gender equality and social inclusion at the core, into all of its work, and within the organization.

**To achieve this goal, the policy establishes two specific objectives:**

- a) To ensure functional gender equality and social inclusion approach at all levels within LWF Nepal, Implementing Partners (IPs) and allies.
- b) To ensure gender equality and social inclusion in all of LWF Nepal's work; systems, planning and programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and risk management.

## SCOPE AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This policy provides a framework for GESI approaches and standards to be adopted and upheld by LWF Nepal in the program cycle and risk management. Compliance with this policy is mandatory. This policy is also a response to LWF Nepal's accountability to the communities it works with, and is therefore to be operationalized as a part of LWF Nepal's Accountability Framework. This policy is complementary to the set of standards of behaviour that all LWF Nepal employees, implementing partners, contractors and consultants are required to adhere to the Code of Conduct, the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Policy and the Child Protection Policy. This policy builds on the findings of the recent gender

audit (August 2020), and the mainstreaming of the PwD guidelines. It should be used together with the GESI Action Plan, GESI Responsive Participatory PME Toolkit, and Gender and Age Marker.

## The basic principles which guide LWF Nepal's work towards GESI are:

**Gender justice:** Women and girls from the excluded social groups and or with disability face multiple discriminations based on their gender, excluded castes/ethnicities and disability leaving them the furthest behind. LWF Nepal is committed to being inclusive and enabling the full and equitable participation of women and men in society, and in its decision-making processes, activities and programs. Therefore, we commit to identify and dismantle the barriers, discrimination and oppression, which hinder the full and equitable participation of women taking into consideration of intersectionality context of the program.

**Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including freedom of own decision making, and being independent from other persons:** By endorsing the Humanitarian Charter, we believe that all people affected by disaster or conflict, including PwDs, refugees, have the right to receive protection and assistance to ensure basic conditions of life are met with dignity and in a secured way. The principles of the Charter is based on the fundamental moral principle of humanity – that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

**Non-discrimination:** We make sure that all of the affected population, including excluded groups (e.g. women, girls, Dalits, other minorities, PwDs), can access assistance and benefit from both humanitarian and development interventions on an equal basis with others.

**Full and effective participation and inclusion in society:** We accept everybody into society without pity, restriction or limitations. LWF Nepal subscribe to the nine Commitments of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS). In our development work, the goal of “gender equality and inclusive development” is to ensure that the excluded groups actively engage in the development process and benefit from the programs and projects on an equal basis with members of the community.

**Respect for humanity, difference and acceptance of human diversity:** We affirm and celebrate the diversity of human beings. Women are seen as a homogeneous group, and responses are developed on this basis. However, women are from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, cultures and experiences. They have a range of identities and needs, talents and skills, which must be valued.

**Equality of opportunity:** The excluded groups face stigmatization and discrimination that are some of the greatest obstacles to ensure equal opportunities. With our humanitarian and development efforts we create equal opportunities for all people irrespective of disability, age, sex, caste, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. We commit to designing our humanitarian and development actions to be accessible to all people.

## APPROACHES

LWF Nepal adopts four track approaches<sup>5</sup> in order to develop and implement humanitarian and development programs/ projects by applying the GESI principles practically, and sustain the impacts. These four approaches are mentioned below:

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<sup>5</sup> *Disability Inclusion Guidelines, June 2019, The LWF World Service.*

## Track 1: Be inclusive Organization

All staff members of LWF Nepal shall have a basic understanding of GESI, its necessity, and methods to work towards GESI. Staff training and strategic human resource practices, among other by recruiting people with expertise on GESI, will be some of the LWF Nepal's strategies for enhancing organizational capacity on GESI. Gender and social inclusion audit exercises shall be conducted annually to review results and identify areas for improvement.

Designated focal points will take the lead, with the Country Director, in rolling out the GESI policy and ensuring organizational policies, structures and systems that are favorable for GESI implementations. Examples of measures to be take are:

- Inclusive recruitment practices as a core principle of HR policy.
- 50% of staff at senior and middle management to be women and vulnerable people from diverse castes/ ethnicities as indicator of workforce diversity and inclusion.
- PME systems promoting participatory PME methods, GESI targets and disaggregated data analysis, collaborative learning and action loops.

The GESI team, which is composed of staff from management as well as field levels, will ensure adherence to the basic GESI principles into the operations of the organization. Moreover, the GESI team will be responsible for the preparation of the GESI and disability inclusion work plan besides coordinating its implementation.

Ensuring inclusivity is a priority for LWF Nepal's knowledge development and communications. In order to be inclusive, special efforts to ensure that marginalized and excluded groups such women, Dalits, Janajatis, PwDs, refugees are visible in documentation, do have access to knowledge products, and other communication materials are developed by LWF Nepal.

By using GESI including disability inclusion sensitive Spider Web Tool for partners' annual participatory organizational and performance assessment, LWF Nepal shall raise awareness and seek to improve GESI responsiveness and disability inclusion amongst implementing partners. Through organizational learning and adaptation, LWF Nepal shall enhance the effectiveness of its organizational strategies and programming, which will be informed by and adapted to the capacities and needs articulated by excluded groups.

## Track 2: GESI mainstreaming

LWF Nepal shall include a GESI perspective in all aspects of programming and project management, from the pre-planning process to baseline development, design and planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. Experience has shown more positive effects and benefit for all when the inclusion of traditionally excluded groups and members of marginalized communities (e.g. women, girls, PwDs, Dalits, refugees etc.) have been considered from the beginning instead of in a later stage.

It is essential to identify context specific barriers to gender and social inclusion as well as solutions available to overcome barriers. This will improve outcomes and provide excluded groups with relevant opportunities so that they are empowered to be active participants, decision-makers and leaders. The four elements of protection mainstreaming will be taken into consideration while planning. These are: (1) prioritize safety and dignity and avoid causing harm to the excluded groups; (2) meaningful access by excluded groups; (3) accountability to the excluded groups; and (4) participation and empowerment of the excluded groups.

LWF Nepal will focus on conducting a GESI self-assessment annually<sup>6</sup>. On the basis of needs identified through this assessment, a GESI action plan with indicators will be implemented to measure if projects implemented by LWF Nepal

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6 LWF Nepal GESI responsive PPME Toolkit, Gender and Age Marker, and LWF Disability Inclusion Toolkit.

have contributed to empower excluded groups, have increased their participation in M&E processes and mechanisms, and what changes should be made in organizational plans, policies and procedures as a result of GESI mainstreaming.

### Track 3: GESI advocacy

For LWF Nepal, advocacy is defined as organized actions, whether at local, national or international level, by rights holders, associations or organizations that aim to bring changes in policies, practices, or value systems that perpetuate injustice in order to safeguard dignity and human rights of all. The ultimate goal of an advocacy action is to create a better and just society for all – not to put the rights of one group over another, but rather to enable marginalized groups, including women, Dalits and PwDs to enjoy their human rights equally in the Nepalese society.

Advocacy planning will include concerns of marginalized and excluded groups. Through discussions with these groups, their challenges and how they are affected, as well as root causes and possible solutions will be identified. Placing human rights actors representing these groups at the centre of our work. This is done through strengthening their organizations, amplifying their voices, and supporting their projects and advocacy campaigns, among other to secure equitable access to livelihoods, quality services, and protection and social cohesion. In addition, advocacy action plans will include evidence-based advocacy for GESI from local to global to local, through instruments such as the Universal Periodic Review, CEDAW and ICESCR<sup>7</sup>.

### Track 4: GESI transformative support

LWF Nepal will focus on transformative strategies for achieving changes in the following four domains for GESI<sup>8</sup> and disability inclusion:

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<sup>7</sup> CESCR = The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

<sup>8</sup> DFID and World Bank. 2006. Gender and social exclusion assessment.

- a) Ensure tangible benefits for the marginalized and excluded groups in terms of increased access to services and basic needs including food security, sustainable income, asset creation, as well as confidence and dignity, leading to reduced vulnerability.
- b) Reinforce rules, regulations, norms which serve to increase their access to and role in decision making and benefit sharing.
- c) Strengthen the capacity, network and ability of marginalized and excluded people to raise their voice, defend their rights and influence decisions and benefit sharing, among other through transformative education programs and support to women human rights defenders.
- d) Engage men and boys in actions toward sending unequal distribution of power, position, property, and preventing and responding to gender-based disparities and social discriminations.

Marginalized and excluded groups often need specific support to ensure their equitable access to participate in, and benefit from, project or program activities. The aim of the specific support is to enhance their empowerment and facilitate their access to and inclusion in the greater community. Specific support has to be identified on a case-by-case basis, and could include affirmative actions, special provisions, targeted training etc.

To achieve the aim of ensuring the excluded groups attain their rights and fulfil their potential, strategic partnerships at various levels must be developed. LWF Nepal will facilitate linking among multi-stakeholders (e.g. local, provincial, federal governments; politicians, other I/NGOs, academia), diverse faith or religious leaders, and human rights activists for actions contributing to the critical changes needed in informal institutions (values, norms, attitudes and practices) that reinforce gender and social disparities and discriminations.

## REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every two years. However, LWF Nepal will undertake an annual review of the implementation of GESI Action Plan, and gender and social inclusion audit exercise. Experiences and learning from the implementation of the plan, and findings of the audit will help identify any changes needed in the structures, systems, approaches and actions.

## DEFINITION

**Gender** refers to socially constructed differences in attribution and opportunities associated with being female or male and to the social interactions and relationships between women and men.

**Gender equality** is the state in which women and men enjoy equal rights, opportunities and entitlements. The treatment of women and men should be impartial and relevant to their respective needs. It is conscious that the same issue affects men and women differently and disproportionately and challenges the notion that everybody is affected by an issue in the same way regardless of their contexts.

**Gender equity** refers to the fair treatment of all people, regardless of their gender, according to their needs and perspectives, through which gender equality is reached.

**Women's empowerment** is the process through which women attain their voice, rights, choice, power, options and control over resources. It is a goal in its own right. To be empowered, women must have the ability to use these rights and opportunities to make choices and decisions as full and equal members of society.

**Gender context** analysis refers to the assessment of women positions in terms of power dynamics, workloads, mobility, access and control over resources, seasonal calendar and cause and effect analysis.

**Gender-based** violence refers to any act of violence directed at an individual based on her or his biological sex, gender identity or perceived adherence to socially defined norms of femininity and masculinity.

**Social Inclusion is** the removal of institutional barriers and the enhancement of incentives to increase the access of the disadvantaged individuals and groups to humanitarian and development opportunities.

**GESI mainstreaming** refers to strategies, methods and tools aimed at achieving greater gender equality and social inclusion in institutions and all programmatic themes.

**Disaggregated Data** refers to distinguishing men and women, ethnic minorities, people with a disability, people with HIV/AIDS, LGBTIQ and other excluded/vulnerable people in the data to reveal quantitative differences between them.



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