



Vision Save for Vulnerable  
Children and Women (VSVCW)

## **VISION SAVE FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND WOMEN (VSVCW)**

### **Programme Policy: Gender Equality**

**GENDER EQUALITY**

## **VSVCW Focus**

- Equal rights for women and men.
- Women's participation in decision making at all levels.
- Men more active in working towards gender equality.
- Gender mainstreaming internally and externally.
- Specific initiatives addressing structural gender inequalities.

### **1. BACKGROUND**

Gender Equality is integral to VSVCW's Rights based commitment and value base and is therefore to be seen as an important aspect of the rights-based approach in light of the all-pervasive systemic gender discrimination and gender inequality. Gender based discrimination is the most widespread form of systemic discrimination and gender inequalities permeate all societies and organisations. Commitment to rights and gender equality are crosscutting objectives that permeate all programme objectives in areas of our development and relief work.

It is clearly established in human rights norms that women and men are entitled, on an equal and equitable basis, to the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. VSVCW recognizes that gender rights are human rights and not special privileges. VSVCW therefore aims at promoting the rights and freedoms of poor, marginalized and oppressed women and men through means that address and remove the barriers to women's and men's full enjoyment of their rights.

Most societies experience unequal power relationships between men and women with resulting systemic discrimination of women. VSVCW will address the unequal power relationship between women and men with the aim of promoting structural change. VSVCW recognizes that combating gender inequality is a political project aimed at transforming social, economic and political structures so that all women, men and children can enjoy and exercise their full human rights. Gender equality and gender mainstreaming can therefore not be achieved without concerted and persistent civil society pressure. One of the structural barriers to effectively achieve gender equality is the failure to actively engage men in gender equality work. Gender has for long been seen by many, both men and women as a women's struggle, whereas the active engagement of men in promoting gender issues is crucial for any sustainable change. Furthermore, it is crucial to address women's multiple identities; women have different interests according to age, class, caste, ethnicity et cetera. Women, who are suffering other forms of oppression, might choose to focus first on these giving less priority to gender and elderly women are often preserving traditions that maintain uneven gender structures.

The status of women and equality between men and women has improved considerably in many developing countries throughout the last half of the twentieth century. Positive developments have been witnessed in the reduced gender gap in school attendance and wages and in increasing the life expectancy of women and women's participation in political life. Nevertheless, despite these positive developments women and girls still suffer extensive systematic discrimination in the vast majority of the countries in the world. There is hardly any developing country where women have equal status to men with respect to legal, social (including sexual and reproductive rights) and economic rights. This manifests itself in considerable gender gaps regarding access to and control over resources and services, economic opportunities and regarding power and political influence. In many countries, women do not have the right to inherit their late husbands' properties including the land. Women's active role in agricultural production is largely unrecognized. In some places women are not allowed to do business, vote or travel without the permission of their husband.

Although women clearly suffer from gender-based discrimination women should not be seen as victims only. In many situations women act both on their own situations and in relation to the wellbeing of their families and societies at all levels. There is a great and often unrecognized potential in building on women's experiences and listening to both men and women's voices in

decisions making. Although in most cases women and girl children are the most vulnerable it is important to recognize that men and boys also face gender rights violations such as coerced sex for boy children these gender rights violations are often overlooked. VSVCW Gender Equality Policy supports the third UN Millennium Development Goal, which is “To promote gender equality and empower women”,

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY

The **overall objective** of VSVCW's gender equality policy is:

The transformation of gender and power relationships in order to empower women and men to build just, equitable and inclusive societies, thereby enhancing sustainable peace and livelihood for marginalized groups.

### **VSVCW OBJECTIVES:**

- Equal participation of women and men in decision-making and women's political influence at all levels of society strengthened.
- Gender inequalities in access to and control over resources, material benefits and education eliminated
- Active involvement of men in promoting gender equality strengthened. All forms of gender-based systemic discrimination eliminated.

## 3. VSVCW FOCUS

### 3.1. ACTORS

#### **RIGHTS-HOLDERS**

The rights-holders are all men and women. All men and women have legitimate moral and legal claims for entitlements. Rights-holders in VSVCW's work are those economically, socially and politically marginalized and excluded in the societies in which they live.

Working rights-based challenges VSVCW and its partners to ensure that their support is targeted at the rights and interests of the most discriminated and excluded groups, and it calls for more disaggregated analyses on which to base strategic programming decisions. While gender discrimination is the most fundamental systemic form of discrimination it is important to recognize that gender is only one aspect and that the interest of women and men in any given context also is shaped by other identities such as race, class, caste et cetera. VSVCW will focus on the most discriminated and vulnerable. Within a specific group of vulnerable people, it is important to look at gender aspects since women and girls will often be particularly vulnerable. At the same time, it is important to pay attention to men and boys and their specific gender rights which is often overlooked.

#### **DUTY-BEARERS**

The national state retains the principal legal responsibility for respecting, protecting and fulfilling rights within its territory and nation states should therefore always be addressed in rights-based programming. Targeted duty-bearers are often those in positions of power or influence who have an impact on the distribution of resources and rights in a given context. Other moral duty-bearers exist at all levels, spanning from the international to the household level. Important moral duty bearers are donor organizations, religious and traditional leaders and faith-based organizations. In targeting women's gender rights, men are important moral duty-bearers.

### 3.2. FOCUS AREAS

It is essential to ensure that gender concerns are incorporated in all actions. At the same time special programmes with a specific focus on combating gender inequality are necessary to rectify gender rights deficits.

**Thus, VSVCW's approach to promoting gender equality is two-pronged focusing on:**

- **Specific actions aimed at directly addressing gender inequalities**
- **Gender mainstreaming (Internally and externally)**

### **3.2.1. Actions aimed at directly addressing gender inequalities**

The first prong of VSVCW's Gender Equality Policy focuses on specific actions directly aimed at addressing gender inequalities. Recognizing that women and girls are often victims of systemic discrimination and that women and girls are often less likely to enjoy the fulfilment of their rights than men and boys, specific attention must be paid to ensuring that women have access to and control over the resources and rights they deem lacking.

This could be in form of support to women's organization and women's empowerment. At the same time attention must be paid to addressing national structural factors including cultural, political and legal systems that hinder gender equality. In all VSVCW focus interventions at least one specific activity addressing gender equality should be developed.

### **3.2.2. Actions for Increased Accountability**

- Advocacy for legal and policy reform e.g. family law, protection against violence, land rights, labour laws, political rights
- Advocacy for institutional reforms: e.g. for more gender-sensitive institutions (health care facilities, financial institutions, agricultural advisory services)
- Advocacy for eliminating barriers to women's effective access to justice systems
- Measures to influence the way gender issues are discussed in the context of promoting a positive gender discourse, e.g. communication projects, awareness-raising among important moral duty-bearers (men's groups, religious leaders, traditional leaders etc.) thereby addressing the social construction of masculinity and femininity.
- Support to participatory gender budgeting processes and gender sensitive social audits and statistics

### **3.2.3. Actions for Political and Legal Empowerment**

- Measures to support women's self-awareness, problem analysis and solving, political consciousness, power analysis, self-assertiveness, and leadership.
- Measures to support increased knowledge of women on rights and institutional systems for rights protection.
- Measures to support increased awareness and actions among men on gender issues
- Measures to support the development and strengthening of women's own organisations .
- Measures to support increased networking of women's organisations e.g. support for networking across identity and ethnicity lines and for increased linkages from the local to the international level.

### **3.2.4. Actions for Security and Protection**

- Support to women's crisis shelters
- Support to programmes addressing women's food security
- Support to programmes addressing women's access to HIV/AIDS care and treatment
- Support to participatory legal resource projects aimed at accompanying women through legal cases
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### **3.2.5. Mainstreaming gender**

The second prong of VSVCW's Gender Equality Policy focuses on mainstreaming gender in organisations and in programmes.

#### ***Internal mainstreaming in organizations***

- Strong commitment and support from VSVCW management and adequate allocation of resources needed.

- Gender included as a cross cutting concern in overall organizational planning
- Gender training included in competence building programmes
- Institutionalization of a Diversity Committee at Head quarter
- Institutionalization of gender responsibilities at the regional office level
- Full integration of gender equality concerns into PME system
- Mainstreaming gender equality concerns into VSVCW information and advocacy work
- Participating actively

### ***External mainstreaming in programmes***

VSVCW support to partner organisations in implementing gender equality actions could include:

- Increasing the awareness of internal mainstreaming including affirmative actions to attract more female staff if that is a problem or to combat gender discriminating power structures in the organization
- Ensure gender disaggregated data collection
- Encouraging and supporting gender training
- Supporting exposure visits
- Increasing documentation on lessons learnt and impact of gender equality policies
- Supporting networking on gender equality between partner organizations
- Attention to women's organizations and networks and other forces of progressive change for gender equality
- Ensuring that local women's organizations have access to long-term funding

## **4. VSVCW'S WORK WITH PARTNERS**

VSVCW recognises that more important than having a Gender Equality policy is that we take concrete active steps to ensure implementation of this policy. Working towards greater gender equality goes from the individual to all levels of the organisation to our partners organisations. VSVCW has made gender equality one of its crosscutting goals and will work to strengthen capacities at all levels of the organisation to pursue it. At the same time VSVCW will strengthen its capacity to monitor and document results both internally and externally. VSVCW will liaise with partners and support an active dialogue and capacity development process on promotion of gender equality concerns at all levels. VSVCW will ensure that its partner base includes organizations working specifically to promote gender equality as a main concern and that VSVCW and its partners participate in relevant gender equality networks.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The present policy represents VSVCW's current overall organisational understanding of the issue and outlines strategic decisions made by VSVCW in order to deal with it. Various tools and guidelines to help operationalise the policy already exist and/or will be developed in response to demands expressed by staff and partners. Further information can be found in the VSVCW Intranet (Programme & Project Manual) or by contacting the Programme Development Unit.

Although it is not the intention to revise this policy on an ongoing basis, it is certainly also not carved in stone. As experience develops, as new insights are gained, and as the world changes around us, there will be a need to also further develop VSVCW's policies, strategies and related tools. Thus, from time to time they should be the subject of discussion both with partners and between staff at different levels.

Please contact the Programme Development Unit with any pertinent ideas, needs, experiences or points of view you feel might enrich VSVCW's policy and practice in attempting to support the poor and excluded in having their rights fulfilled.

**Approved 08.2020**

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