

Policy on Gender Equality and Gender Rights

Africa-Asia Impact works to promote gender equality, gender rights, and inclusive participation across all our activities. We recognize that gender inequalities are culturally rooted and vary significantly across contexts, including in Bangladesh and Tanzania, where we work closely with women from ethnic minority groups and with communities in which both women and men face different forms of vulnerability shaped by gender stereotypes and structural factors (upbringing, social norms, religion, legislation, inheritance rules, access to land, etc.).

This policy outlines our principles and guidelines for promoting gender equality, preventing discrimination, and ensuring that women and men can participate meaningfully and benefit from our work.

The policy complements Africa-Asia Impact's other organizational policies.

1. Fundamental Principles

Africa-Asia Impact is committed to:

- Promoting equal rights, opportunities, and protection for all genders.
 - Integrating gender equality as a cross-cutting priority in all projects, partnerships, and organizational processes.
 - Basing our work on internationally recognized standards, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and principles of gender mainstreaming.
 - Ensuring zero tolerance for gender-based violence, discrimination, or exclusion in all our work and partnerships.
 - Applying gender-transformative approaches where possible and safe, approaches that actively promote acceptance and harmony between genders by challenging harmful gender norms and reducing structural inequalities and unbalanced power relations within communities.
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2. Gender Justice in Opportunities and Resource Distribution

Gender equality requires more than treating everyone the same. In many of our project areas, particularly among ethnic minority women in Bangladesh and among pastoralist communities in Tanzania, women are structurally disadvantaged compared to men.

Africa-Asia Impact therefore works according to a principle of gender justice:

- Gender justice means allocating support, resources, and opportunities according to need, not necessarily equally, to ensure that women, men, and gender minorities have genuine and fair access to participation and benefits.
- Measures to advance gender justice may include:
 - targeted and justice-based selection criteria,
 - dedicated capacity-building for women,
 - separate or enhanced mini-grants for women,
 - mentoring and technical support for women-led micro-enterprises,
 - gender-sensitive meeting practices (e.g., ensuring women sit at the front, receive speaking time, and feel safe to participate),
 - practical accommodations (timing, transportation, childcare, etc.).
- Gender justice also applies to men when they are the marginalized group, for example, young men affected by harmful masculine norms, alcohol misuse, or pressure arising from traditional expectations of strength, success, or being the family provider.
- Gender justice measures can, where relevant, form part of a gender-transformative approach that not only alleviates symptoms of inequality but aims to change the underlying norms and structures that produce inequality.

3. Gender Analysis in All Projects

All projects must be designed based on a context-specific gender analysis that assesses:

- Household and community power relations and gender roles
- Distribution of responsibilities and unpaid care work
- Access to resources, markets, and decision-making spaces
- Risks of gender-based violence and backlash
- Gender-specific needs in the local cultural context
- Barriers affecting ethnic minority women, young men, widows, single mothers, and marginalized groups

The gender analysis must inform project activities, budgets, risk analysis, and monitoring frameworks, and identify where gender-transformative approaches are feasible, safe, and relevant.

4. Inclusion of Both Women and Men

Although many Africa-Asia Impact projects have women as primary beneficiaries, we work broadly with all genders and recognize that:

- Sustainable gender equality requires the positive engagement of men,
- Supporting women without engaging men can trigger conflict or backlash that worsens women's situations instead of improving them,
- Men, especially young men in fragile contexts, are also negatively affected by restrictive gender norms, marginalization, socio-economic pressure, and expectations to be “strong”, successful, or the principal provider.

Africa-Asia Impact has extensive experience demonstrating that community-wide sensitization, awareness-raising, and dialogue, including with men, elders, religious leaders, and village authorities, significantly increases acceptance of women's participation. This approach has proven effective in Bangladesh, where projects consistently begin with broad community sessions before launching women-focused activities. We bring this experience into all new projects and adapt it to the local context.

Therefore, Africa-Asia Impact will:

- Engage dominant gender groups in dialogue and relevant activities alongside marginalized groups,
- Involve husbands, local leaders, and young men in awareness-raising and joint learning processes,
- Address harmful norms affecting both women and men,
- Promote mutual respect, cooperation, and positive household and community dynamics,
- Integrate gender-transformative approaches into project activities where such approaches support shifts in harmful norms and strengthen inclusion, rights, and opportunities for all genders.

5. Preventing Gender-Based Violence and Backlash

Africa-Asia Impact is committed to:

- Assessing the risk of backlash when women receive support (e.g., mini-grants, training, business assistance, or increased visibility),
- Designing projects that actively mitigate these risks through:
 - joint information and dialogue sessions for couples,
 - parallel activities for women and men where appropriate (e.g., if a woman receives business support, her husband also receives relevant support),
 - mediation and dialogue where needed,

- collaboration with local gender-rights organizations,
 - safe and confidential reporting mechanisms,
 - thorough training for all project staff in do-no-harm and conflict-sensitive practice,
 - gender-transformative violence-prevention components that challenge the norms and power structures that create the conditions for violence.
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6. Fair Distribution of Project Benefits

In activities such as capacity-building, livelihood support, mini-grants, and access to natural resources (e.g., sand dams, water, land, tree planting), projects must:

- Ensure that marginalized genders, most often women and girls, have real access to the most valuable project resources and outcomes, not only “lighter” or less impactful activities,
 - Prevent dominant gender groups (typically men and boys) from monopolizing resources or decision-making roles,
 - Ensure transparent and well-documented allocation practices,
 - Monitor the effectiveness of gender justice measures and adjust strategies as needed,
 - Apply gender-transformative principles where shifts in gender norms can improve fairness and lead to more sustainable and equitable outcomes.
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7. Gender Identity and Diversity

Africa-Asia Impact respects the dignity of all people, including those whose gender identity or expression differs from traditional norms.

We operate in contexts where legislation restricts the rights of some gender identities:

- In Tanzania, certain gender identities are criminalized.
- In Bangladesh, the hijra community (third gender) is legally recognized, but individuals often face social marginalization, and homosexuality is criminalized under Section 377.

Africa-Asia Impact is committed to:

- Treating all people with respect and dignity,
- Preventing discrimination,
- Ensuring participant safety in accordance with local laws and social norms,
- Promoting more inclusive attitudes through dialogue and rights-based awareness-raising where safe and feasible,
- Applying gender-transformative approaches where inclusive norm-change can occur without compromising the safety of individuals or communities.

8. Project Design and Implementation

All projects must:

- Base their gender strategies on a specific, localized gender analysis and on relevant gender-transformative approaches,
- Integrate gender equality and gender justice in design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation,
- Include concrete and budgeted measures to strengthen participation by marginalized genders (especially women and girls),
- Incorporate relevant initiatives for dominant gender groups (especially men and boys) where such efforts support shared gender equality,
- Address socio-cultural and behavioral barriers to participation for women and girls from ethnic minority groups in both Bangladesh and Tanzania, in project activities as well as in recruitment processes,
- Include risk analyses addressing gender-based violence and backlash (e.g., domestic violence, harassment, risks during travel or public participation),
- Include budgeted capacity-building for local partners, leaders, and project staff.

9. Internal Practice and Capacity-Building

Africa-Asia Impact will:

- Ensure that staff and partners have knowledge of gender equality, gender justice, and gender-transformative approaches,
- Provide training in gender analysis, do-no-harm principles, and the prevention of gender-based violence,
- Maintain a diverse and inclusive work culture free from gender-based discrimination,
- Collaborate with partner organizations that share our values and policies.

10. Follow-up and Revision

- This policy will be reviewed at least every three years or in response to significant contextual or legal changes, or the development of specific projects.
- All partners must approve and comply with this policy as part of their collaboration with Africa-Asia Impact.
- Project teams must document how gender equality, gender justice, and gender-transformative approaches are integrated throughout the project cycle.