

MUKTI FOUNDATION

GENDER Policy



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1. Introduction

Founded in 1996, the Mukti Foundation (MF) has emerged as a prominent non-governmental organization (NGO) in Bangladesh, collaborating extensively with governmental and non-governmental entities. MF's primary focus lies in addressing the socio-economic challenges encountered by marginalized women within the country. These challenges include limited access to healthcare, economic vulnerability, and the denial of legal and democratic rights, particularly evident in urban slums.

The organization is dedicated to establishing communities that are environmentally sustainable, rights-based, and free from exploitation. It prioritizes the empowerment and participation of the poor, aiming to enable them to overcome poverty and realize their full potential.

With over 70% of its beneficiaries being women, MF implements various programs and initiatives aimed at providing legal, health, and socio-economic support to millions of individuals. Gender mainstreaming is a key aspect of MF's approach, recognizing the persistent reality of gender inequity and striving to promote positive change in the lives of women and girls through its activities.

2. Statement of Commitment

At Mukti Foundation, we are committed to gender equality as a fundamental principle and an essential driver of social progress and development. We recognize that gender differentiation, discrimination, and exploitation persist in Bangladesh, depriving women of opportunities, resources, and access to essential services. Without addressing these issues, true societal advancement and inclusive development remain elusive.

Gender equality is crucial for Mukti Foundation because it ensures that all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes. By promoting gender equality, we aim to create a work environment where women and men can thrive equally, unleashing their full potential and making meaningful contributions to our organization and society as a whole.

Our commitment to gender equality is reflected in our gender policy, which sets the framework for integrating gender considerations into all aspects of our operations. Through this policy, we strive to foster a culture of gender sensitivity, understanding, and respect among our staff. We acknowledge the importance of mainstreaming gender in our programs and initiatives, ensuring that they benefit both women and men equitably.

In essence, gender equality is not just a moral imperative for Mukti Foundation; it is also a strategic imperative for achieving our organizational goals and creating a more just and equitable society. We are dedicated to promoting gender equality in all our endeavors, working towards a future where every individual has the opportunity to thrive regardless of gender.

3. Normative Framework:

Women in Bangladesh bear a disproportionately high share of the nation's poverty burden. Statistics on human development continue to show significant levels of discrimination and deprivation against women despite efforts to change this.

In developing our gender policy, MF considers influential international and national policies that promote gender equality and prevent gender discrimination. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, is a pivotal commitment by state parties to ensure equal rights for both genders across various spheres. Bangladesh, too, has endorsed the National Women Development Policy, providing guidance for gender equality efforts. Furthermore, the concepts of gender equality are emphasized in the Constitution of Bangladesh, which declares in Article 28 that there is no room for discrimination based on gender and supports equal rights for men and women in all spheres of public life. Furthermore, gender equality is emphasized as being essential for prosperous and sustainable communities in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5.

In keeping with these guidelines, MF recognizes that developing a gender policy is essential to advancing equality within the organization and its initiatives. Our goal is to create a gender-sensitive workplace that satisfies legal requirements while fostering inclusivity and individual empowerment for all people, regardless of gender. MF takes its cue from these legal and normative standards in its dedication to advancing gender equality and making a positive impact on society.

4. Scope

This policy will apply to all individuals associated with MF, including staff members, board members, volunteers, partners, contractors, and the communities we serve. It covers all facets of our operations and interactions, ensuring a thorough approach to promoting gender equality and inclusivity with consideration for intersecting identities.

MF's commitment to gender equality extends from our headquarters to field offices and project sites. This policy is comprehensive, extending to all our programs, initiatives, and partnerships. It underscores the necessity of integrating gender perspectives into every facet of our work.

5. Guiding Principles for Gender Policy at Mukti Foundation:

- **Commitment from Leadership:** Mukti Foundation's leadership commits to championing gender equality and fostering a culture of inclusion and diversity throughout the organization.
- **Comprehensive Policy Implementation:** Implementing a comprehensive gender policy that addresses various aspects of gender equality, including but not limited to equal pay, ending violence and harassment, and promoting work-life balance.
- **Intersectional Approach:** Recognizing and addressing the intersecting forms of discrimination faced by individuals based on factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, class, disability, sexual orientation, and other identities.
- **Inclusive Decision-Making:** Ensuring women's active participation in decision-making processes at all levels of the organization, creating safe spaces for dialogue, and valuing diverse perspectives.



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- Empowerment and Leadership Development: Prioritizing women's empowerment through access to education, training, and economic opportunities, and fostering leadership development initiatives for women at all levels.
- Prevention of Violence and Harassment: Adopting a zero-tolerance policy towards violence and harassment, implementing comprehensive workplace policies, and providing support to those affected by such incidents.
- Transparent Reporting and Accountability: Establishing clear monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track progress on gender equality goals, and ensuring transparency in reporting gender-disaggregated data and outcomes.
- Collaboration and Partnerships: Fostering partnerships and collaboration with government agencies, civil society organizations, private sector entities, and other stakeholders to advance gender equality initiatives.
- Continuous Learning and Improvement: Committing to continuous learning, adaptation, and improvement of the gender policy based on evolving contexts, best practices, and feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders.
- Promotion of Gender Norms and Behaviors: Engaging in public awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts to challenge harmful gender norms and promote positive behaviors that contribute to gender equality and social change.

6. Gender Integration in Programming

Gender integration is embedded throughout all levels of MF's development activities. The gender policy aims to seamlessly incorporate gender considerations across various operational domains. It seeks to address the needs of both women and men throughout the design, planning, execution, monitoring, and evaluation phases of policies and programs, thereby mitigating perpetuated inequalities.

Prioritizing gender mainstreaming involves inclusive considerations for women, men, and children of all ages. Analyzing familial and communal dynamics is essential to understanding how they influence access to development programs. The gender policy will establish screening criteria to reinforce the principle of inclusive development and facilitate gender-responsive impact monitoring.

7. Gender-Responsive Workplace

The Gender Policy aims to guide all MF staff members, including those at grassroots levels, to actively contribute to gender equality efforts. MF strives to become a highly gender-sensitive and supportive organization where women play significant roles. To realize this vision, MF will undertake the following actions:

a. Recruitment:

- Actively work to reduce the gender gap among MF staff members.
- Preference will be given to suitable female candidates in recruitment advertisements, and female candidates with equal test scores will be prioritized during selection.
- Gender sensitivity will be considered a crucial criterion in the selection process for all staff levels.
- Gradually ensure greater representation of women in recruitment boards.



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- Give preference to females for tasks that promote gender equality.
- Avoid placing female staff in workplaces where they may be at risk.
- Pregnancy will not be a disqualification for employment, and MF will support pregnant employees until their pregnancy is not at risk.
- Strive to maintain gender balance in all new recruitments.
- Take steps to increase female participation in higher management positions.

b. Posting and Transfer:

- MF shall, as far as possible, try to post the husband and wife in the same station if they are both MF staff members provided that the quality of work is not at question. Similar decision shall also be taken in case of transfer.
- Transfer of pregnant women from the first month of pregnancy till the 5th month after delivery shall be avoided as far as possible, however, if the situation so arise transfer could be made in consultation with the woman concerned to ensure her safety and security of the pregnancy or the newborn
- Posting and transfer of male staff whose wife is in similar condition shall be considered in the above perspective;

c. Promotion:

- Ensure equal opportunity for both women and men staff in promotions, without discrimination based on gender.
- Give preference to women staff for promotion when other factors are equal, to increase female representation in senior management.

d. Zero Tolerance Policy for Sexual Harassment:

Implement a strict Zero Tolerance Policy against any form of sexual harassment, including mental and physical violations, with appropriate punitive measures.

e. Leave Policy:

- Allow female employees maternity leave of up to 3 months for each child, with dates recommended by a physician. Additional leave may be granted if certified by a physician.
- Provide special leave for women employees to attend to their children's illnesses as per organizational rules.
- Grant one week of paternity leave with pay to male employees for each child.

f. Financial and Other Facilities:

- Both female staff and the spouses of male staff members will have equal opportunities to receive support for special medical expenses related to childbirth for a maximum of two children, following the organization's rules and regulations.

- Withdrawal of money from the provident fund to cover expenses during childbirth will be permitted following the rules outlined in the Provident Fund regulations, ensuring financial support for staff during significant life events.
- Both female and male employees will receive equal salary, house rent, travel allowance, gratuity, increment, and medical allowance to ensure fairness and equity in compensation.
- Adequate budgets will be allocated within core programs and projects to provide special facilities for female employees, ensuring their needs are met effectively.

g. Infrastructure Provision

- MF will provide separate toilet facilities for female staff members at the office premises to ensure privacy and comfort.
- Provide separate prayer rooms, reserved toilets, and comfortable workspaces for pregnant employees.
- The office will be equipped with pad vending machines or sanitary pad facilities to cater to the menstrual hygiene needs of women employees, promoting their well-being and convenience.

h. Employee Skill Enhancement and Training Initiatives

- To improve the performance and engagement of female employees at all organizational levels, customized programs will be offered for capacity development training to staff both internally and externally.
- Staff development programs, which include participation in training, workshops, seminars, and other activities both domestically and abroad, will ensure a balanced gender representation ratio.

i. Disciplinary Actions, Suspension, and Employment Termination Protocols

- Staff can be terminated by HR policy. However, if any employee is subjected to sexual harassment by another employee, the offender will be terminated using the appropriate process.

j. Additional Support Services:

- Long journeys during pregnancy and menstrual periods will be accommodated.
- Administrative and legal measures will be taken at all organizational levels to address instances of sexual abuse and harassment, by MUKTI FOUNDATION's service and discipline rules.
- If any staff member is assaulted by an outsider, the organization will provide comprehensive support to the affected individual.
- The organization will provide counseling and assistance to any female employee who experiences mental or physical abuse from a family member.

- MF will offer special facilities for women, including day-care centers, lunch breaks for lactating mothers, transportation during late pregnancy, secured accommodation at field levels, and assistance for mothers attending babies while on assignments.

8. Gender Policy Implementation at Mukti Foundation

Mukti Foundation is committed to achieving gender equality through a comprehensive Gender and Intersectionality Advocacy Unit (GIAU) structure that addresses the limitations identified in the previous proposal.

a. Gender and Intersectionality Advocacy Committee (GIAC)

A central Gender and Intersectionality Advocacy Committee (GIAC) will be established, comprised of representatives from various departments, including women staff members and individuals with recognized expertise in gender issues.

The Gender and Intersectionality Advocacy Committee will be responsible for:

- Overseeing the implementation of the Gender Policy.
- Advising senior management on gender mainstreaming across the organization.
- Making recommendations to leadership on policies, programs, and resource allocation to promote gender equality.
- Reviewing and revising the Gender Policy periodically to ensure its effectiveness.

b. Gender Focal Points (GFPs)

Each department will designate a staff member as a GFP. It is recommended that the GFP position prioritizes women and individuals with a strong interest in gender equality. GFPs will act as resource persons within their departments, providing guidance and support to colleagues on gender issues.

Responsibilities of GFPs will include:

- Collaborating with the GIAU on departmental initiatives related to gender equality.
- Identifying and addressing gender disparities within their departments.
- Supporting colleagues in integrating gender considerations into project design, implementation, and monitoring.
- Participating in capacity-building programs on gender and acting as mentors to other staff members.
- Serving as a point of contact for staff with questions or concerns regarding gender equity in the workplace.

c. Capacity Building Strategy



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Mukti Foundation will develop a multi-layered capacity-building program to equip staff at all levels with the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate gender equality into their work. This program will include:

Induction training: All new staff will undergo training on Mukti Foundation's Gender Policy, concepts of gender equality, and strategies for gender mainstreaming.

Gender sensitization workshops: Interactive workshops will be conducted for staff at all levels to raise awareness about gender issues, unconscious bias, and power dynamics.

Training modules: Specialized training modules will be developed for different departments, focusing on integrating gender considerations into specific program areas.

Mentorship opportunities: Senior staff with gender expertise will be paired with junior colleagues to provide guidance and support on incorporating gender equality into their work.

d. Data Collection and Analysis

The GIAU will establish a system for collecting and analyzing gender-disaggregated data across all programs and departments. This data will be used to:

- Monitor progress towards achieving gender equality goals.
- Identify areas where further efforts are needed to address gender disparities.
- Inform decision-making on program design, resource allocation, and policy interventions.

e. Collaboration and Resource Allocation

The GIAU will foster strong collaboration with all departments and project teams to ensure effective implementation of the Gender Policy. This will involve:

- Regular meetings and consultations between the GIAC, department heads, and project teams.
- Providing technical support and guidance to departments on integrating gender considerations into their work plans and budgets.
- Advocating for the allocation of adequate resources to support gender equality initiatives.

f. Monitoring and Evaluation

The Gender and Intersectionality Advocacy Committee will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Gender Policy. This will involve:

- Regularly reviewing progress reports submitted by departments and project teams.
- Conducting periodic audits to assess the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming efforts.
- Preparing annual reports on the status of gender equality within Mukti Foundation.



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9. Communicating the Gender Policy at Mukti Foundation

Mukti Foundation is committed to ensuring everyone understands and embraces its Gender Policy. Here's a communication strategy targeting staff, beneficiaries, and partners:

a. For Staff:

- **Induction Training:** All new staff will undergo training on the Gender Policy during onboarding. This will include an overview of its purpose, key principles, and reporting procedures for gender bias/discrimination.
- **Internal Communication Channels:**
 - Publish a clear and concise summary of the Gender Policy on the Mukti Foundation intranet.
 - Include the full policy document as a downloadable resource.
 - Feature articles or blog posts highlighting examples of successful gender mainstreaming within the organization.
 - Utilize staff meetings and internal newsletters to discuss the policy and its implications for daily work.
- **Capacity Building:** As outlined in the Gender Policy Implementation section, Mukti Foundation will offer workshops and training modules on gender sensitivity, unconscious bias, and integrating gender considerations into project design and implementation.

b. For Beneficiaries:

- **Translated Materials:** Translate the policy summary or key points into the local languages spoken by your beneficiaries.
- **Community Outreach:** During project implementation, conduct awareness sessions with beneficiaries about gender equality, their rights, and the Gender Policy complaint mechanism.
- **Visual Aids:** Develop clear and accessible posters or infographics illustrating the policy's purpose and grievance procedures, using visuals and minimal text.
- **Beneficiary Feedback Mechanisms:** Integrate questions about gender equality and their experience with Mukti Foundation's programs into beneficiary surveys or feedback forms.

c. For Partners:

- **Partnership Agreements:** Include clear statements referencing Mukti Foundation's Gender Policy and commitment to gender equality in partnership agreements and proposals.
- **Joint Training Sessions:** Organize joint training sessions with partner organizations on integrating gender considerations into program design and implementation.
- **Regular Communication:** Maintain open communication with partners, sharing progress reports and success stories related to gender mainstreaming within your projects.



Signature

Accessibility:

- Make the full Gender Policy document and its summary available on Mukti Foundation's website, alongside translation options for key languages.
- Consider creating an audio version of the policy summary for accessibility purposes.

10. Review and Revision

Mukti Foundation recognizes the importance of keeping its Gender Policy current and effective. Here's our commitment to regular review and revision:

a. Review Schedule:

The Gender Policy will be formally reviewed every two years. Additional reviews may be conducted as needed in response to significant changes in:

- National legislation or international frameworks related to gender equality.
- Best practices in gender mainstreaming within the development sector.
- Internal evaluations highlighting areas where the policy requires adjustments for better implementation.

b. Review Process:

The Gender and Intersectionality Advocacy Committee (GIAC) will be responsible for leading the review process. The GIAC will gather input from various stakeholders, including:

- Staff members through surveys, focus group discussions, or suggestion boxes.
- Beneficiaries through feedback mechanisms implemented within projects.
- Partners through consultations and joint reviews.
- Based on the collected feedback and data analysis, the GIAC will propose revisions to the Gender Policy.
- The revised policy will be presented to senior management for approval. Once approved, the updated policy will be communicated to all staff, beneficiaries, and partners through the channels outlined in Section VII (Communication of the Gender Policy).

11. Continuous Improvement:

Mukti Foundation believes in continuous improvement. Beyond the formal review process, we encourage ongoing dialogue and feedback on the Gender Policy. Staff, beneficiaries, and partners are welcome to share their suggestions through the following avenues:

- Contacting Gender Focal Points (GFPs): Each department has a GFP you can reach out to with questions or suggestions.
- Reporting Through the Suggestion Box: A dedicated suggestion box allows anonymous feedback on the Gender Policy and its implementation.



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- Emailing the Gender and Intersectionality Advocacy Unit (GIAU): The GIAU welcomes feedback via a dedicated email address

12. Annex 1: Reporting Gender Bias or Discrimination at Mukti Foundation

Mukti Foundation is committed to fostering a work environment free from gender bias and discrimination. We encourage all staff members to report any incidents they experience or witness. Here's a clear and accessible process for reporting:

Reporting Options:

Confidentially:

Speak to a Gender Focal Point (GFP): Each department has a designated GFP who serves as a resource person for gender issues. You can confidentially discuss your concerns with your GFP.

Report to the Gender and Intersectionality Advocacy Unit (GIAU): The GIAU can receive reports confidentially through a dedicated email address or a physical suggestion box located at the project office.

Formally:

Submit a Written Report: A standardized reporting form will be available online and in hard copies at the HR department. This form allows you to outline the details of the incident and submit it anonymously or with your identification.

What to Include in Your Report:

Briefly describe the incident, including the date, time, and location (if applicable).

Identify the individuals involved, if known.

Explain the specific behavior you believe constitutes gender bias or discrimination.

Include any witnesses, if applicable.

If comfortable, share the impact of the incident on you.

Investigation Process:

All reports will be promptly reviewed by the GIAU or HR department, depending on the reporting method.

The investigation will be conducted confidentially and with sensitivity to all parties involved.

You will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation while maintaining confidentiality as much as possible.

Outcomes and Support:

- Depending on the nature of the incident, appropriate disciplinary action may be taken.



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- The GIAU or HR department will provide support and resources to address the situation and prevent future occurrences.

Additional Resources:

- You can find a copy of the Gender Policy and the reporting form on the Mukti Foundation intranet.
- If you feel uncomfortable reporting directly to your supervisor or department head, you can reach out to any member of the Gender and Intersectionality Advocacy Committee for guidance.

Our Commitment:

Mukti Foundation takes all reports of gender bias and discrimination seriously. We are committed to providing a safe and fair work environment for all staff members.

13. Annex 2: Key Definitions

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes.

Gender Audit is a participatory gender audit is a tool and a process based on a participatory methodology to promote organizational learning at the individual, work unit and organizational levels on how to practically and effectively mainstream gender.

Gender Balance is commonly used in reference to human resources and equal participation of women and men in all areas of work, projects or programmes.

Gender discrimination is defined as: "Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field." [United Nations, 1979. 'Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women'. Article 1]

Gender Equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men.

Gender mainstreaming is the (re) organization, improvement, development, and evaluation of policy processes so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making.

Intersectional Gender Approach is a social research method in which gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality and other social differences are simultaneously analyzed.