

POLICIES – GENDER POLICY



AJESH

***P.O. Box 328, Behind Divisional Delegation of Taxation Gardens
Limbe – South West Region – Cameroon.***

Tel: (237) 233 334 082 (office), 699 13 38 03 (mobile)

Email: info@ajesh.org / ajeshint@gmail.com

CNPS N°: 413-0110757-000-x, Tax Payer's N°: M121212403879G

Website: <https://www.ajesh.org>, Facebook: AJESH Cameroon, Skype :harrinokaje

GENDER POLICY

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1 ABOUT AJESH

AJEMALEBU SELF HELP (AJESH) is a not-for-profit organization legally registered in Cameroon (2006), USA (2022), Ghana (2022), Tanzania (2023), etc. We were originally founded in Cameroon by a few development professionals and like-minded thinkers to promote nature-positive and self-help poverty alleviation initiatives of the forest and coastal dwellers in Africa taking into account the sustainable management of nature and the environment.

The focus of the organization is to sustainably manage natural resources by promoting community well-being through Human Rights-based Approaches (HRbA) in harmony with their environment through sustainable terrestrial and marine ecosystem protection and restoration, Sustainable livelihoods, and the promotion and facilitation of nature care services. AJESH's efforts in the different countries are concentrated on nature protection-based approaches (NPBA) in the areas of biodiversity conservation; wildlife management; freshwaters and wetlands protection; lands, forest, and marine governance; forest restoration; climate change; ecosystem-based adaptation; nature-based solutions (NBS); landscape management; forest and wildlife monitoring; livelihood and food security; agroecology, agroforestry and regenerative agricultural promotion; essential services; sustainable livelihoods; human rights; and access to health care services for communities around protected areas. AJESH carries out her activities in partnership and collaboration with related government services, and international and national organizations.

- **VISION:**

Promote sustainable management of natural resources and enhance socio-economic conditions in local communities through empowerment of community members.

- **MISSION:**

To nurture, and promote a healthy and sustainable society free from poverty and injustice while living in harmony with nature.

- **GOAL:**

To improve the socioeconomic well-being of communities through the participatory management of their natural resources.

- **VALUES:**

Integrity, honesty, and commitment are essential values that drive us to deliver excellent quality service.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Until the 21st century, the organizational policies were largely concentrated on the expansion of the business operations. Consideration to workplace safety gained less attention since women were not frequently involved in the business activities. Women joining the professional sectors were limited to teaching and nursing. After the post industrial revolution and social movements, women began to enter the occupational and professional careers to supplement the rising needs of the family. Gradually the need based involvement of women in the industry shifted to interest based involvement in the top notch professions which impacted the choices of hiring amongst organizations. They became more open and flexible in acquiring women employees and were looked from a macro perspective then being a homemaker. This change in the mindsets halted the myths and assumptions concerning the difference of masculinity & femininity and ensuring that both genders have equal rights, authority, power and access to different set of resources.

3 HOW TO MEASURE SUCH EQUALITY

But now the question arises, how such equality in the organization or any workplace is achieved and measured? One possible solution could be formulating a comprehensive Gender Policy covering all key issues necessary in ensuring the equal rights, participation and access to men and women in the organization.

A well drafted and properly disseminated Gender Policy demonstrates the level of transparency and attention given to gender equality in the organization by the top management. The term 'Gender' has a wide scope to cover than just by limiting to the total number of women involved in the organization. A sound Gender Policy represents the organization's commitment to gender equality and incorporation of sensitivity involved with each staff member in the day to day decision making processes. In fact, Gender Policy is a comprehensive term which determines the protocol for a healthy workplace, lays guidelines on conduct with internal and external stakeholders, manner in which the private lives of the staff are taken into account and social complexities associated with a staff's background. Thus, all the areas affecting workplace is part of Gender Policy. *The 'Gender Policy' acts as a blueprint for the top management to integrate and promote gender equality within its organizational culture and programmatic operations.*

4 WHAT IS A GENDER POLICY?

Gender Policy is a set of principles and ideal practices applied across different levels of employment in the organization to build a healthy workplace culture and equality among all employees. The policy also provides a framework for action to ensure that the staff are equally treated and given full access to different resources and opportunities. The policy also focuses on 'mainstreaming' of gender both in implementation



work as well as in the decision making processes. Gender Equality Tool of International Labour Organization (ILO) explains the degree of mainstreaming of genders '**Mainstreaming is not about adding a "woman's component" or even a "gender equality component" into an existing activity. It goes beyond increasing women's participation; it means bringing the experience, knowledge, and interests of women and men to bear on the development agenda**'. The main objective of the policy is to maximize Fair Equitable participation and free access by all employees to key work areas in the organization.

5 RELEVANCE OF GENDER POLICY IN THE DEVELOPMENT SECTOR

The Constitution of Cameroon and many other African countries prohibits the state from discriminating on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex and place of birth in various day-to-day activities; and Article 39 urges the state to ensure that citizens, men and women equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood, right to shelter, food, education and work. Gender equality is a global phenomenon with international community taking initiatives in fostering this positive change in all spheres of life.

IMPORTANT LAWS TO BE KEPT IN FOCUS WHILE DEVELOPING A 'GENDER POLICY'

- Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women 1993,
- Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1993
- Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013
- Vishaka Guidelines against Sexual Harassment at Workplace - Guidelines and norms laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in Vishaka and Others Vs. State of Rajasthan and Others(JT 1997 (7) SC 384)

Many countries where AJESH intervene have ratified the Convention on elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) bill in 1993, making it legally bound to put its provisions in practice. By accepting the Convention in working in the countries, AJESH is committed to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including:¹

- To incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women;
- To establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination;
- To ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.

With the rise in easy access to technology and higher participation of western countries in the developing nations, Gender Policy has started getting due push and impetus. The existing NGO sector in Africa is unstructured and widely spread across far flung rural to cosmopolitan regions. Gender policy is a niche concept and not spoken much in the development sector as it is presumed to be followed by the organizations. In development sector, it becomes even more essential to create and implement a gender policy as the main forte is to empower vulnerable communities. Thus, developing an ethical and equal workplace is a must for implementing the welfare projects downward in the target locations. Every employee of the organization is a key player especially when the organization is working with and for the empowerment of communities.

Therefore Gender Policy should not be treated as a small section or chapter in the Human Resource Policy, in fact it should have its own space with clear set of principles, actions plan and a committee to resolve gender specific issues in the organization to which employees of all levels must adhere to.

¹ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

6 SPECIFIC PURPOSES OF THIS GENDER POLICY

- To serve as a framework for maximizing fair and equitable access to opportunities in terms of Ownership, Leadership, Representation and Governance.
- To clarify roles and responsibilities of each position and level in the organization irrespective of the gender.
- To establish Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for handling grievances related to gender inequality.
- To form a committee equipped with adequate authority in order to take required action in case of any grievance or breach of provisions of the gender policy.
- To ensure compliance with the law of the land.

7 USERS OF GENDER POLICY

Gender Policy talks about the inherent values of an organization which covers wide range of stakeholders such as:

- I. Board
- II. Top Management
- III. Staff
- IV. External Agencies/ Donors
- V. Resource Partners
- VI. Any other person prescribed by the organization

The above mentioned stakeholders are expected to familiarize themselves with the conduct of the Gender Policy/Manual governing the code for a healthy and equal opportunity based workplace.

8 POTENTIAL AREAS UNDER THE POLICY

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|-----------------------------------|--|
| <p>Institutional Level</p> | <p>Staff Policies: All staff policies, rules and regulations shall be gender sensitive and will be reviewed periodically.</p> <p>Recruitment: AJESH seeks gender balance in staffing. Women candidates will be encouraged to apply for all vacancies including management and leadership positions both at the field and head office. There will be adequate representation of women in recruitment and interview panels.</p> <p>Performance reviews: Gender sensitivity will be one of the performance indicators for assessing employees.</p> <p>Capacity building for gender sensitization: We will organize workshops, training programs and discussions for promoting and enabling a gender sensitive work culture. Also, regular training will be conducted on awareness and confidence building of field staff, with special focus on women staff.</p> <p>Harassment: Our Anti Sexual Harassment policy is gender neutral and is in compliance with the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal).</p> |
| <p>Programmatic Level</p> | <p>Building skills and capacities on gender perspectives to enable greater participation of all sections of community in our programs will be one of our objectives in all programs.</p> <p>All programs will promote equal participation of all stakeholders. To promote and assess inclusion of gender equity in each project, managers will prepare and use a gender equity checklist.</p> |

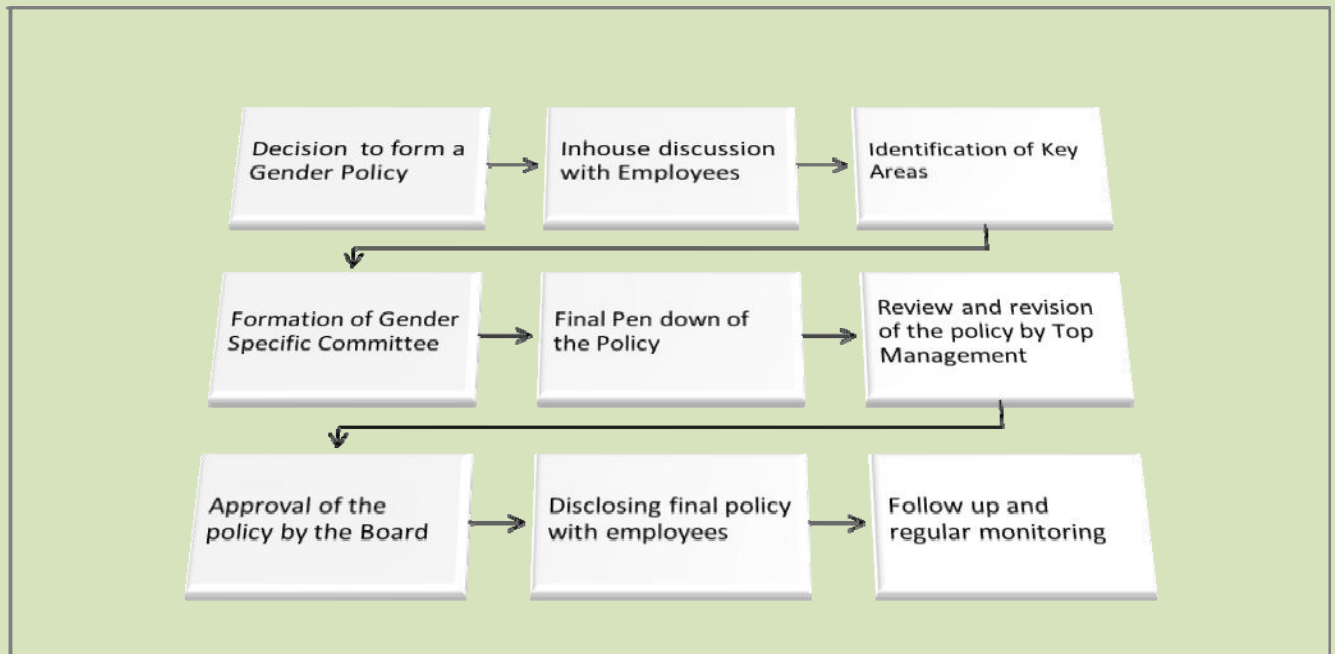
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|---|--|
| <p>Recruitment and Retention</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Open dissemination of recruitment process, job description and work delivery expectations, -Fair selection process based on the requirement of the position, skills, experience, and knowledge of the candidate, -Fair and Equal monetary compensation to the selected candidate irrespective of the gender, -Organizing skill and performance analysis of all employees on regular basis to ensure the work performed by each employee is duly valued, -Providing Training and Development opportunities to all employees. |
| <p>Promotions and Growth</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Conducting analysis of the number of promotions for both women and men annually, -Consider employees on parental leave for promotion, -Proper communication of opportunities for promotion so as to be easily accessed by all employees throughout the organization. |
| <p>Training and Development</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Implement mentoring or sponsorship programs in non-traditional areas for women particularly, -Conduct analysis on the number of women and men accessing training and development programs, -Ensure all employees have an annual career discussion with their senior managers that includes an annual training and development plan. |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Termination / Resignation</p> | <p>-To implement a process for capturing exit interview data for each employee to identify the correct of reason for termination or resignation,</p> <p>-To implement a process for tracking and comparing the number of women and men resigning from the organization.</p> |
| <p>Safety, and Freedom from Violence</p> | <p>-Ensuring the safety of female employees in the workplace, including travel to and from the workplace,</p> <p>-Prohibition and prevention of all forms of violence in the workplace, including verbal, physical, and sexual harassment,</p> <p>-Ensure flexible working conditions for women employees.</p> |
| <p>Equal participation in the Management and Governance</p> | <p>-Ensure fair representation of men and women in the Board, and Top Management,</p> <p>-Providing due responsibility and authority to all members of the board and management to initiate and execute given task.</p> |

9 DEVELOPING A 'GENDER POLICY'

The *Human Resource Department* prepared this Gender policy taking the vision, mission and objectives of AJESH into consideration. A separate committee is formed within AJESH to look into gender specific issues when such arises.

10 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK



Once a strategic level planning through interactive sessions by top management is held and the same is transparently disseminated to all stakeholders mainly employees, it goes to the concerned department mainly HR department to identify the key areas that would form part of the policy in consultation with staff members.

After the initial exercise that formed this Gender policy, the committee members were selected based on their competences in-house. The members selected include staff from all units, genders and diverse experience. While forming the committee members, below mentioned areas were considered and disclosed to other staff members:

- Process of formation and selection criteria of the committee members,
- Mandate, Powers, Responsibilities, Authorities and different functions of the Committee Members,
- Recording of the meetings and agenda discussed during the respective meetings,
- Clearly specify the names and contact details of the members,
- Implementation framework of changes brought forward by the committee in this regard at the office and field level.

Further, the committee has a separate framework for the field staff that generally operates in far located disadvantaged areas.

Once the basic background was ready, it went to the final assigned team to get it structured and some external expertise was sought. The Gender Policy covers internal, institutional, programmatic, external service delivery issues as well as the issues arising in the field area.

Further, the draft policy was discussed and reviewed by top management and respective committee members before it got the approval by the Board members. Once the policy was approved by the Board it was shared and disclosed down to the employees.

KEY POINTERS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT WHILE DEVELOPING THIS GENDER POLICY

- A. Commitment to gender equality through the Board statement or comparably prominent means,
- B. Displayed commitment in the workplace with due emphasis and made it available to all employees in a readily accessible form,
- C. Established benchmarks to measure and monitor progress towards gender equality and report results publicly,
- D. Established a clear, unbiased, non-retaliatory grievance policy allowing employees to comment or complain about their treatment in the workplace,
- E. Engaged in constructive dialogue with stakeholder groups, including employees, other non-governmental organizations, business associations, donors customers, and the media on progress in implementing the organization's commitment to gender equality.

11 CONCLUSION

AJESH has people from different walks of life, different capacities, different backgrounds and can have different approaches and opinions about various issues pertaining to Gender prospect. Some do may not be comfortable to discuss these issues and others just overlook the long term repercussions of non-adherence of such policies.

*Thus, it is imperative to understand the significance associated with the adverse effects of not adhering to the provisions of Gender Policy particularly the legal and reputational consequences. Looking at the upcoming global concerns over disadvantaged genders business operations cannot be performed in isolation. Also this policy is in conformity with national, regional and international legal compliance. With the understanding that stakeholders are now much more vigilant and participative in selecting its partners, an issue which seems small might not be the way it appears. Moreover, maintaining a healthy workplace contributes to the upward growth of the organization and assist the top management to retain its employees for a longer period. As such AJESH thinks a *good and adhesive Gender Policy is an indispensable tool for ensuring fair working environment which is free from all forms of discrimination. Once the key components of the policy were finalized, it was disclosed to all the employees and stakeholders for due adherence and practice in day to day operations.**

Therefore in AJESH, Gender Policy is not treated as a small section, it has its own space with clear set of principles, actions plan and an internal committee to resolve gender specific issues to which employees of all levels adhere to.