



GENDER POLICY

1. Background

1.1 The Development Status of Nepal, and Nepali Women

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world, among the 50 'least developed countries' as defined by the UN. In terms of human and social development, Nepal ranks 138 out of 177 countries in the Human Development Index (2006), the lowest ranked in mainland Asia. Out of an estimated population of 27.5 million, about 31% people are living below the poverty line.

Life expectancy in Nepal remains one of the lowest in South Asia, 61.5 for women and 60.5 for men, while its infants and maternal mortality rates among the highest with appalling statistics, Infant mortality is 61 per 1,000 live births and the maternal mortality rate of Nepali women (281 per 100,000 live births) ranks among the highest in the world. One out of every 185 pregnant women dies because of pregnancy and childbirth-related complications. Another key indicator is adult literacy rate in Nepal which is 63% for men and 35% for women. Other development indicators reveal Nepal's deep-rooted poverty and the poor status of women.

<i>Development Index</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
GDP per capita (PPP) US \$	2224	1162
Human Development Index (HDI)	0.581	0.452
Human Poverty Index (HPI)	25.2	42.0
Gender-related Development Index (GDI)	0.562	0.430
Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)	0.425	0.365

The Nepal Human Development Report 2004 (UNDP)

Women as well as girls suffer from inadequate nutrition in both quantity and quality of food, perform excessive labor and have limited access to health and family planning services. Dietary intake of pregnant women in Nepal is inadequate. Low Birth Weight also leads to an intergenerational cycle of malnutrition. Small baby girls become small mothers, giving birth to small babies. In Nepal 51% of children below 5 years of age are affected by stunting, 48 % of the children are underweight and 10 % are wasted (thin for their age), which is an indicator of acute under-nutrition. Iron deficiency anemia is by far the most common nutritional problem in Nepal affecting approximately three-quarters of women and children. 36% of women age 15-49 are anemic, however 42 % of pregnant women are anemic and nearly one in two (48%) Nepalese children 6-59 months old are anemic (Nepal Demographic Health Survey 2006). Since the majority of the health staff are male not only in general services, but also in the women specific services, social barriers make it difficult for women to access health services though these are widely inadequate in any case. (Gender Assessment in Health Sector, UNDP 2002)

1.2 Women's Oppression and Rights in Nepal

Discrimination based on patriarchal structures has undermined the dignity, self-respect and confidence of most Nepalese women. Nepal has one of the highest indices of son preference in the world. Boys not only pass on the family name, but represent 'insurance' for parents in their old age and can carry out important rituals when parents die. Girls generally work at home and in the fields, considered too unimportant and risky to educate, given the high value attributed to virginity and the related dangers that schooling in the company of boys and men outside the household might pose. The triple role of women – namely reproductive (domestic or household tasks sustaining children and family), productive (economically reductive work in or outside the home) and community management (tasks carried out for the benefit of the wider community) is heavy and little valued. Women are oppressed by a combination of patriarchy and religious-cultural

norms and values. Women are seen as subordinate to male partners, denied access to property and when engaged in development, predominantly object rather than actors. Women have very little access to and control over resources. Women are socially and economically disadvantaged and rarely in decision-making positions. In this environment of denial of rights and subjugation, many women suffer from sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination including issues such as early marriage, dowry, and trafficking.

The Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2063 (2007) prohibits discrimination against women in any form merely for being a woman. Every woman shall have the right to reproductive health and other reproductive matters, no physical, mental or any other form of violence shall be inflicted to any women, such an act shall be punishable by law. Despite provision for the protection of women's rights, in practice they are widely ignored or trampled upon. Women are silent, and invisible, their rights widely denied and violated.

2. Rationale

LWF Nepal and its partner organizations recognize the need to work more systematically and effectively to address women's strategic issues within their programs and organizations. LWF Nepal strongly feels the need to formulate a more realistic and relevant gender policy in order to address inherent discrimination against women wherever it occurs in order to advance the status of women and enhance their innate power, based on LWF Nepal's experience regarding empowerment. LWF Nepal's programs are right-based, rooted in the belief that all human beings are born equal and all people are entitled to the full exercise of their fundamental human rights.

3. LWF Nepal and Gender

Gender refers to the different roles, responsibilities, needs, interest and capacities of women and men. They are influenced by social and cultural factors, often deeply rooted in the culture and strengthened by religious beliefs. These differences are learned through life, but they are also changeable. Although gender roles limit both women and men, they generally have had a more repressive impact on women and have restricted their participation in the development process.

LWF Nepal was established in 1984 and is one of the leading International NGOs (INGO) active in both development and humanitarian works. The development approach practiced by LWF Nepal has evolved from community development through sectoral actions including women's development and, in recent years towards people's empowerment in which rights-based approaches play a key role.

LWF Nepal is presently guided by a Country Strategy for the period 2008-2013. LWF Nepal works with disaster-affected, marginalized, vulnerable and socio-economically disadvantaged people, especially women, from deprived or discriminated rural communities which include the displaced (such as refugees) and the marginalized including artisan castes (Dalits), former bonded laborers (Kamaiya), women, landless, ethnic minorities and other socially and economically deprived people in its working areas.

LWF Nepal's program priority is: The dignity and human rights of oppressed, vulnerable and marginalized people are respected and upheld. The organizational priority is: LWF Nepal fulfils the highest programmatic and administrative standards and is focused on empowerment and human rights.

Gender is one of the cross-cutting themes that LWF Nepal stresses across all program interventions. LWF Nepal will strengthen its focus on women's rights and gender equity across all operations. It will prioritize women from among its focus groups. It will plan specific actions to strengthen the ability of women and girls to claim their rights and meet basic needs; promote leadership and equal participation of women; raise men's as well as women's awareness on gender issues and equal rights; promote behavioral change through dialogue with and support to

communities. The two priority MDGs to which LWF Nepal seeks to contribute directly are: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; and promote gender equality and empower women.

4. LWF Nepal Vision, Mission and Goal for Gender

Vision: LWF Nepal envisions a society that is free from gender based discrimination.

Mission: LWF Nepal is committed for gender mainstreaming through empowering women and ensuring their equal participation in all social and economic activities at program and organizational level.

Goal: The main goal is to mainstream gender equality and women's rights in all its activities and policy decisions.

5. Gender Aspects at Program Level

The standalone Women's Development Project, operated by LWF by applying the then Women in Development approach, mainly for women's income generation, from 1986-1999 in one district was an important early program initiative. Later, LWF Nepal has increasingly incorporated development elements promoting women's status throughout all its programs.

In community development then later empowerment programs, deliberate efforts were made to organize formerly isolated women and to develop their awareness and build their own grassroots organizations. To expand their control over financial resources, women have received priority in livelihood opportunities offered through savings and credit program, skills training and others.

In refugee work (BRP), deliberate efforts have been made in order for both refugee women and men get actively involved in camp management. Refugee women in particular take a leading role in social activities including skills development and income generation. In addition, all refugees are made aware about sexual & gender-based violence (SGBV) and careful efforts are constantly made to monitor and redress SGBV cases. In emergency programs, special attention is always given to the special needs of women and children at the time of assessment, planning and implementation. Gender sensitivity is applied in all development projects including HIV & AIDS and Preventive Health. Disadvantaged girls of the focus groups are provided with scholarships for higher education.

LWF Nepal works with a growing range of implementing partner NGOs, CBOs and CBO Federations including women-led organizations to address the specific issues of women. Partners are also encouraged to emphasize gender issues in their organization and program. Women self-help groups in all projects are aimed to encourage women leadership. A focus on gender issues is applied throughout planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, ensuring gender sensitivity in all interventions at program and organization level.

Gender sensitization training for staff within LWF and for all stakeholders has become a regular feature in all projects. International Women's Day is widely observed across LWF, IPs and the focus groups.

6. Gender Aspects at Organizational Level

LWF Nepal has reflected its own awareness in the following organizational policy provisions to enhance gender sensitivity within the organization to promote the rights of women staff. Increasingly similar provisions are encouraged in the organizational policies of partner organizations also:

- a) Maternity leave of 65 working days (within a year of pregnancy and delivery).
- b) Provision for half-day leave without pay for one month after maternity leave.

- c) Provision for childcare center within the organization if resources are available.
- d) Paternity leave - 15 continuous days after the birth of a child.
- e) Childcare allowance for 18 months for care of a child up to 24 months of age.
- f) To facilitate female staff participation in training, provision for travel by bus or by LWF vehicle (if used for trainees), food and boarding facility to a child caretaker.
- g) Provision of porter up to the road head to women staff traveling in rural areas
- h) Compassionate leave for female & male staff.
- i) To protect and promote the interests of women staff, a Women's Staff Forum has been established;
- j) 3 positions out of 7 are reserved exclusively for women staff in the LWF Nepal National Staff Council. Women can also be directly elected to the other 4 positions.
- k) LWF Staff Code of Conduct regarding abuse of power and sexual exploitation is in effect.
- l) Female and male staff will be given equal opportunity in capacity-building activities
- m) Deliberate efforts are made to increase the number of women staff especially in managerial positions;
- n) Provision of two years' scholarship award for a girl child for 11 and 12 class study

The following are some of gender-friendly practices observed within LWF Nepal;

- a) Provision of separate toilets for female staff.
- b) Breast-feeding time for lactating mothers, up to one hour per working day.
- c) Vacancy announcement only for women, as and when appropriate.
- d) Priority for women staff in use of official vehicles, in special cases (for e.g. illness, late working hours and pregnant women).
- e) Differently-abled staff members are given priority in use of official vehicle.

7. Gender Policy Objectives

The following objectives are set for this Gender Policy.

- a) To create an environment where women's voices are heard and gender issues are raised at program and at organization levels.
- b) To encourage equal participation of women and men throughout the project cycle and to give priority to gender-sensitive programming.
- c) To build the capacities of women and men to raise their voice against sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination.
- d) To foster gender awareness and sensitivity at all levels (organizational, partner NGOs, CBOs, CBO Federations)
- e) To build the capacity of staff and partners to mainstream gender at all levels.
- f) To create and promote opportunities to increase the number of qualified and experienced women in decision-making positions in order to ensure equal representation of women and men and greater participation of women in program level and organization level.
- g) To ensure the effective implementation of LWF Staff Code of Conduct regarding abuse of power and sexual exploitation through effective mechanisms in LWF and in its Implementing Partner organizations.

- h) To increase gender equity in staffing and in organizational decision-making in LWF and to influence partner organizations to do so.
- i) To sensitize and build capacity and empathy among all staff of LWF, its IPs and the leadership of all focus groups institutions in general and women staff/leaders in particular so that they play an effective role in helping the poor women of the focus groups so that they can come out of the situation where they are presently in, as described in the Background above.
- j) To ensure that the staff of LWF and IPs effectively advocate for proper implementation and practice at all levels of progressive gender policies and laws of the land.

8. Approaches

Within the framework of Core Values – Dignity and Justice, Inclusiveness and Participation, Accountability and Transparency, Dedication, Compassion and Decency – outlined by LWF Nepal in its Country Strategy, the following approaches will be followed in its gender policy;

- a) Collaboration and Participation: LWF Nepal and partners believe in collaborating and creating an environment that can sustain mutual trust, respect and transparency among men and women.
- b) Social inclusion: LWF Nepal believes in the participation of socially-excluded people (Dalit, Disadvantaged, people with disability, displaced) in the development process.
- c) Women's rights: LWF Nepal will make efforts to promote and protect women's rights essentially in socially discriminated sectors
- d) Gender justice and equity: LWF Nepal believes in the promotion and practice of gender equity and justice in all their activities and respecting each other's values can achieve equity between women and men.
- e) Sustainability: LWF Nepal believes that sustainability can be achieved through favorable organizational environment for women and can lead to development and harmony.
- f) Diversity: LWF Nepal will make efforts to include the remote and geographically disadvantaged and minority people in development is mainstreaming at all level (program management and implementation).

9. Strategies

For the implementation of this policy the following program level and organizational level strategies are established.

9.1 Program Level

- a) Capacity-building of staff, partners and marginalized & vulnerable communities to address gender concerns.
- b) Conduct gender analysis before, during and after implementation of projects and actions.
- c) Women and men to be equally represented in project cycle
- d) Ensure gender-disaggregated for all aspects is systematically collected and analyzed.
- e) Sensitization and utilization of media to address gender concerns.
- f) Advocacy on gender issues at all levels of the program.
- g) Empowerment of women to increase their access to and control over resources,
- h) Avoid gender biases and stereotyping in the program.
- i) Collaborative approach to be initiated with like-minded organizations in program planning and implementation.

- j) Mobilizing for immediate action to respond to serious cases of gender violence

9.2 Organizational Level

- a) Capacity-building of staff and partners to address gender concerns,
- b) Ensure equal representation and active participation of women and men at all levels especially in decision-making positions and mechanisms throughout the process of planning, designing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation,
- c) Ensure adequate allocation of human and financial resources to include gender-sensitive programs and activities that empower women and build gender expertise,
- d) Personnel policy including recruitment, promotion, leave benefits, to be regularly reviewed and rationalized to take into account the specific situation and needs of women and men,
- e) Partnering and networking with NGOs, CBOs, CBO federations and other like-minded organizations, particularly those working on gender issues and for the advancement of women,
- f) Avoid gender biases and stereotyping in the organization,
- g) Strengthening relationships with existing networks, alliances and related agencies on gender issues.
- h) Gender-related documentation, research and monitoring systems.

10. Priority Issues

10.1 Program Level

- a) Gender analysis in planning and implementation.
- b) Incorporating sessions on gender in all trainings/ workshops.
- c) Priority allotted to marginalized, vulnerable and socio-economically disadvantage people especially women.
- d) Awareness and advocacy of women's legal rights including domestic violence issues,
- e) Community sensitization on women's reproductive health, focusing on pregnant and lactating mothers.
- f) Enhancing the participation of men in the program to create a supportive environment for the women.
- g) Support programs, which will increase the participation of women in the decision-making process at the household and community level.
- h) Support programs/activities that will enhance the practical needs of women in particular.
- i) Research on the situation of women in the working areas of LWF Nepal and partner organizations.
- j) Recognize the extra burden on women created by development work and adapt interventions accordingly.
- k) Ensure access and control over resources and in decision making forum for the empowerment of women.

10.2 Organization Level

- a) Gender sensitization to staff members and their family members.
- b) Increase the proportion of women staff members in the organization.
- c) Increase the access of women staff members in decision making.

- d) Follow a gender sensitive personnel policy particularly related to promotion.
- e) Opportunities for human resource development provided to staff members of LWF Nepal and partner organizations (especially those working in remote areas, Dalits, and women).
- f) Enhance gender and management expertise in LWF Nepal and its partner organizations.
- g) Implement gender sensitive practices.

10.3 LWF Nepal Staff Personal Level

- a) Engagement of children (persons under the age of 18) for employment and sexual activity is prohibited. The local cultural practice or mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not an excuse.
- b) Exchange of money, employment, goods, for sexual favors or other forms of humiliating, demeaning or exploitative behavior is prohibited.
- c) Never commit any act or form of harassment that could result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to individual, especially women and children.
- d) According to UDHR, ALL children are born equal. It is therefore necessary that all children in the family, irrespective of gender get equal treatment.

11. Accountability Mechanisms

In order to ensure the LWF Nepal Gender Policy is applied in practice, accountability mechanism will be strengthened. Gender Policy will be implemented after endorsement and approval from National Review Committee (NRC).

Women's Staff Forum and National Staff Council members will monitor the Gender perspective in LWF program and staff levels. Women staff forum member will call a general meeting with all women staff once every year to review and discuss on gender issues.

Where action may be required, important program issues arising requiring immediate attention will be raised through the regular management line (raised to the respective District Manager, Regional Manager, Human Resource Development Manager, Finance & Administration Coordinator, Program Coordinator and then to the Country Representative) while other less pressing matter matters will be considered by the National Review Committee

Organizational issues will be forwarded to the HRDM (Human Resource Development Manager) who will take up the issues at NSC and NRC for suggestions and action.

LWF-Nepal will ensure reporting on key gender-related development and indicators both for program and organization level in its regular reporting, and communicate the Gender Policy at program and organizational management levels.

12. Time Frame

This policy will be effective for the duration of the current Nepal Country Strategy (until 2013) and until further notice. Based on this policy, LWF Nepal and each partner will prepare simple annual action plans relating it to their ongoing work to ensure the policy is implemented. Progress will be reviewed in LWF Nepal Senior Staff Meetings and reporting. If required, the Gender Policy can be revised as and when needed.