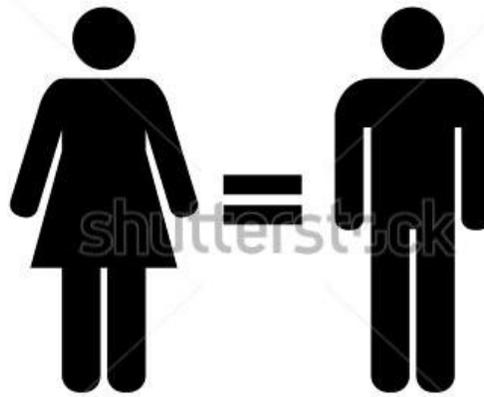




Advocacy Initiative for Development (AID-SL)

Motto: Transforming Lives & Communities!

GENDER EQUALITY POLICY



Gender Equality

Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone (AID-SL) Policy on Gender Equality

Building an Equal World for all Children

Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone believes that gender equality is central to achieving our vision for change: a world in which all children, both girls and boys, realize their full potential in societies that respect people's rights and dignity.

Gender inequity varies in its expression from place to place, but in all communities where AID-SL works, we encounter some form of gender-based discrimination, gender stereotyping and an unequal distribution of power between women and men, girls and boys.

This injustice especially affects the lives of girls and women from infancy to adulthood. It contributes to high infant and childhood mortality, to low educational achievement, and to failures to protect children from harm. It also affects the economic survival of families and the participation of children and young people in family and community decisions.

Many violations of children's rights have their roots in gender-based inequality, exclusion and injustice.

Achieving gender equality is therefore a core objective of AID-SL's work as an organization dedicated to child rights.

Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone (AID-SL) commitment to gender equality is based on the international standards established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone Policy on Gender Equality Building an Equal World for all Children, we believe that gender equality is central to achieving our vision for change.

International References:

- The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the main reference document and core foundation of. Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone Child-Centered Community Development (CCCD) approach relies on the collective action of civil society to generate the empowerment of children to realize their potential, and on the actions of states to live up to their obligations under the CRC.
- The 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is often described as an international bill of rights for women. By accepting the Convention, governments committed themselves to undertake measures to end gender discrimination in all forms.

- Other key references for Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone Policy on Gender Equality are the outcome documents of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and follow-up documents, the commitments of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, including the 51st session on the ‘Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child’ (2007), and the recommendations of the UN Study on Violence against Children (2006). In addition, the UN Millennium Development Declaration (2000) called for global commitment towards combating poverty through the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment as reflected in the third Millennium Development Goal.

The Core Objectives of Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone (AID-SL) Policy on Gender Equality

This Policy on Gender Equality reinforces and builds on a strong commitment that Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone responds to rights based Child Centered Community Development (CCCD) approach.

The objectives of the policy are:

- To provide a clear vision, consistent messages and a coordinated approach to the promotion of gender equality by AID-SL offices at all levels;
- To set standards of gender equality against which AID-SL will hold itself accountable.
- To guide AID-SL staff in adopting principles and practice of gender equality in their personal and professional lives.
- To reaffirm and strengthen Advocacy AID-SL efforts to advocate equal rights for girls and boys.
- To foster an organizational culture that exemplifies AID-SL commitment to gender equality to international, national and local stakeholders, including children.
- To engage partners in joint approaches to promote gender equality and children’s rights.

The Context: Gender Justice

Some gains have been made in closing gender gaps. Many countries have passed legislation against gender discrimination and have outlawed practices that harm girls such as female foeticide, child marriages and female genital cutting. An increasing number of girls are attending schools and completing their education; there are more women in public office, and women have more opportunities to participate in the economy.

But everywhere in the world, girls and women are still disproportionately affected by poverty, injustice and discrimination. They have lower social status than boys and men, less control over their lives, less decision-making power, and less access to services and economic resources.

Gender-based discrimination and gender stereotyping are human rights infringements and contribute to cycles of poverty which may affect communities over many generations. Girls who are not allowed to go to school or who are married when they are still children face particular challenges which disadvantage them so that in the future, they will not be able to effectively promote the rights of their own daughters and sons. Gender stereotyping that promotes dominant traits of masculinity also affects the capacity of boys to develop healthy relations with girls, and limits their ability to grow up to become caring partners and fathers. For example, boys who are raised to be aggressive and to feel superior to women are at risk of growing up to be violent and abusive.

Because of the relationship between the rights of children and those of women, AID-SL has adopted an approach that promotes both child rights and gender equality in programmes, policies, partnerships and operations. AID-SL is committed to integrating gender equality objectives and measures in all programmes. At the same time, AID-SL will pursue specific programmes of empowerment for girls and women to close existing gender gaps and to support them to overcome inequality, discrimination and stereotyping.

Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone (AID-SL) believes that targeted and strategic investments in the promotion of gender equality can improve the quality of programmes, and significantly contributes to poverty reduction and the realization of human rights.

Therefore, AID-SL will tackle gender injustice head on at many different levels, from the individual to the level of social institutions and policies. In so doing, AID-SL will actively promote gender equality in every sphere of our programmes, partnerships and organizational culture.

Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone Commitments

Based on the six principles of AID-SL Child-Centered Community Development, the organization makes the following twelve commitments:

CCCD Principle: - Children are at the centre of Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone programme Commitments
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1. Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone (AID-SL) will confront and challenge gender discrimination, stereotyping and unequal power relations between men and women, and boys and girls in the interest of promoting the rights of children. Gender discrimination, gender stereotypes and gender inequality are among the root causes that prevent children from realizing their rights to survival, development, protection, participation and an adequate standard of living. AID-SL commitment to gender equality is an inseparable aspect of the organization's principle of placing the rights of children at the heart of all activities. It means that AID-SL will seek to understand gender inequities and their effects on children at different stages of their development, and will respond appropriately by challenging the structural and systemic causes of gender-based injustices.

CCCD Principle; - AID-SL programmes are guided by human rights standards and principles. Commitments
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2. The organization will advocate and promote gender equality as an explicit human and child rights AID-SL work is based on the understanding that gender equality and children's rights are inherently interlinked. AID-SL actions to end child poverty and promote child rights cannot be separated from actions to promote gender equality; they must go hand in hand.

3. AID-SL will systematically work to end all forms of gender based violence and all practices that undermine the dignity of children and their right to protection from physical and psychological harm. Gender based violence disproportionately affects girls and women, as do many traditional practices that cause injury and harm. They are the most flagrant forms of gender injustice committed in the home, in educational institutions, at work or in the community. AID-SL will work to end violence and protect children from harm in all settings, including in situations of emergencies and disasters.

CCCD Principle: - Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone (AID-SL) programmers promotes an environment of social inclusion and non-discrimination.

4. AID-SL will build programmes and partnerships that promote respect for diversity and sensitivity to cultural differences. AID-SL will not tolerate practices that result in gender based discrimination, prejudice or inequality. Children are socialized into roles and identities that are influenced by the cultures and traditions of their community. Cultural diversity is a precious resource. Traditions and culture can, however, also be a source of discrimination, exclusion and the violation of children's rights. AID-SL respects and celebrates the cultural diversity of our partner communities. We are, however, committed to overcome exclusion and discrimination, whether it is based on sex, age, religion, ethnicity, economic status, caste, citizenship, sexual identity or orientation, marital status, physical or mental disability, HIV status, or urban/rural residence. By engaging with communities, AID-SL will seek to overcome injustices within children's own cultural context, transforming tradition from within towards the achievement of greater gender equality and justice.

5. Advocacy Initiative For Development Sierra Leone (AID-SL) will implement long term strategies of social change to address the causes of gender based exclusion and discrimination. AID-SL recognizes that gender discrimination compounds social marginalization. Among children with disabilities, refugee children, children of the very poor or the socially excluded, girls are generally more likely than boys to experience discrimination, violence, exploitation or neglect. Working with the most excluded and vulnerable children are a key aspect of AID-SL Child Centered Community Development strategy. AID-SL efforts to overcome social exclusion will address gender injustice as a specific area as well as in the context of all other underlying causes of marginalization.

CCCD Principle: - Gender equality is an integral objective of all Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone (AID-SL) programmes.

6. AID-SL will ensure that a gender analysis and actions to promote gender equality are included in all programmes. AID-SL programmes will support the rights of girls and of boys. This commitment of AID-SL to gender equality applies to development programmes, to national and international advocacy, and to emergency and disaster responses. AID-SL will challenge gender inequality by ensuring that girls and boys have equitable access and control over the resources and benefits of development and that duty bearers are held accountable for respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of children. AID-SL marketing, communications and fundraising strategies will convey this commitment to sponsors, donors and development partners.

7. AID-SL will promote the empowerment of girls and women in order to close gender gaps and ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to realize their rights. Empowerment of girls and women builds their ability, opportunity and space to make decisions and choices about their lives, to develop a sense of self worth and to actively shape their future. Gender norms disproportionately work to the disadvantage of women and girls. For AID-SL, however, reducing gender inequality is not just an issue of developing programmes that favour girls, but rather this empowerment strategy compliments AID-SL to mainstream gender equality across its entire programming. Plan is committed to an all encompassing approach that ensures complex power relations are understood, so that the roots of inequality can be addressed. The empowerment of girls and women leads to more gender justice.

8. AID-SL will engage with men and boys in promoting gender justice by challenging gender stereotyping and other root causes of gender discrimination. Stereotypes of masculinities and femininities harm all children. They prevent girls and boys, men and women from developing healthy relationships based on mutual understanding and respect. They are barriers to the equitable sharing of responsibilities in families for household decisions and child rearing. AID-SL policies and programmes aim to transform gender relations by engaging boys and men in the work for gender justice at all levels.

CCCD Principle: Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone (AID-SL) programmes maximise the free and meaningful participation of children.

9. AID-SL will ensure the equitable and meaningful participation of girls and boys in decision making processes that affect their lives. As part of our work to promote gender equality, AID-SL will address the gender related barriers to participation in order to assure that girls and boys individually or as groups have equal opportunities to speak out, be heard and influence decisions. This includes the meaningful and equal participation of girls and boys in the development, monitoring and evaluation of AID-SL programmes.

CCCD Principle: - Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone (AID-SL) is accountable for its actions in support of children's rights.

10. AID-SL will create an enabling environment for gender equality to thrive in our internal organizational culture. AID-SL will foster an inclusive workplace environment that promotes diversity and abolishes inequality, discrimination and prejudice. We will cultivate gender sensitive leadership that is enabled to confront both overt and subtle forms of inequality and discrimination in our offices. We will promote the equitable sharing of power and decision making between women and men at all levels of the organization. This means that AID-SL will take active steps to recruit, train and support more women into leadership and other positions. To support a gender aware workplace and organizational culture, AID-SL will pursue family friendly work policies and practices that enable both women and men to participate fully in work and family life.

11. AID-SL will analyze the risks that may arise in the pursuit of gender justice and will take steps to prevent any potential harm to girls and boys. Gender equality requires complex social changes. Promotion of gender equality involves risks and may generate conflicts in the short term in order to attain long term goals. AID-SL will analyze the risks and implement strategies to mitigate them, to manage potential conflicts, and to assure that the implementation of our programmes and policies do not cause harm.

12. AID-SL will mobilize and dedicate the human technical and financial resources to meet its commitments to gender equality. AID-SL will ensure that the commitment to gender equality is reflected in the allocation of technical financial and human resources.

Policy Implementation

Processes to support Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone on Gender Equality

This policy outlines Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone's vision and commitments to gender equality as part of our rights-based Child Centered Community Development approach. It will be supported by a gender strategy which will guide us in implementing the commitments and in translating the policy into operational plans linked to results and targets. AID-SL will provide technical support and tools to equip staff at all levels of the organization to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate their work from the perspective of achieving gender equality.

All staff members across AID-SL, regardless of function or office location, are accountable for the implementation of the commitments outlined in this policy. This will be reflected in job profiles and performance reviews of staff at all levels.

AID-SL Country and Regional Offices will implement the Policy on Gender Equality. National Directors and Regional Coordinators are accountable for this process. Progress on gender equality will be included in the quarterly reports prepared by our offices at all levels.

AID-SL Executive Director is ultimately responsible for the implementation of the Policy on Gender Equality. The ED will report on the implementation annually to the Board. The Programme Operational and Leadership Team (POLT) is responsible for monitoring annual progress towards greater gender equality.

A Gender Reference Team will provide support for the development of methodologies and indicators to monitor this Policy on Gender Equality. It will submit an annual summary report to the POLT. Each Regional Office will establish a monitoring mechanism to support the implementation of the policy and will provide an annual regional report to the Gender Reference Team.

AID-SL is accountable for the implementation of the Policy on Gender Equality to the children, communities and partners with whom we work, to our sponsors and donors, and to our staff. This accountability will be assured by integrating the commitments outlined in this policy in AID-SL Programme Accountability and Learning System (PALS).

AID-SL Policy on Gender Equality shall be reviewed every five years, or earlier if required, based on annual reports and a gender equality assessment.

All staff members across AID-SL are accountable for the implementation of the commitments outlined in this policy.

Gender Equality Standards

In order to monitor the implementation of the Policy on Gender Equality, Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone has developed standards in five areas to act as benchmarks against which progress will be measured.

The standards will be adopted by us and will be applied to country, regional, national and global reporting on programmes, human resources, communications and marketing. This will assure our accountability to the commitments made in this policy. The realization of these standards is a progressive effort that will be achieved gradually after operational strategies on gender justice have been developed and adequate resources for their implementation have been mobilized.

Area 1: Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone Structures, Systems and Policies

Gender equality measures will be integrated in the way our offices organize, function and conduct their work at all levels of the organization, including Programme Units, Country Offices, Regional Offices, Offices of National Organisations and the International Office. This will include:

- Human resource systems and policies are gender sensitive and responsive. Gender equality is integrated into staff objectives, accountabilities, and performance management systems, including recruitment, retention, promotion, training and remuneration. Performance monitoring and reporting explicitly document progress in the application of gender equality standards and commitments Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone routinely tracks and reports the gender balance of staff and governance structures and seeks to balance male and female representation at all levels and types of positions.
- Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone Code of Conduct and our Whistle Blowing Policy on sexual harassment are known by all staff and are effectively enforced to deal with issues of sexual harassment. Incidents of sexual harassment are reported in our Incidents Reports. A complaint mechanism is put in place to deal with situations of gender discrimination in the workplace.
- Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone monitors, evaluates and institutionalizes organizational learning on gender mainstreaming. The learning is shared across and beyond the organization.

- Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone regularly assesses and develops the skills, knowledge and attitudes of staff and partners to implement the twelve commitments of the Policy on Gender Equality. Office management and training plans reflect the capacity needs for gender mainstreaming. Training on our Policy on Gender Equality is integrated as a mandatory component in the induction of all new staff.
- Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone offices allocates sufficient funds for realizing the Policy on Gender Equality in their annual budget. Gender specialists and/or focal points are included in human resource plans for National Offices; Regional Offices and National Organisations Budget guidelines include information on the integration of gender equality objectives. The resource needs for gender mainstreaming are reflected in fundraising strategies.
- All Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone offices develops action plans for gender equality in the workplace. This includes the implementation of a human resources policy that ensures equal pay for equal work and equal opportunities for promotion based on performance and capacity. Gender action plans also include the establishment of workplace policies that are family friendly, including flexible working hours, adequate maternity and paternity leave and provisions of space for breast feeding and child care.

Area 2: Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone Programmes

All strategic plans, including Country Strategic Plans and Programme Unit Long-Term Plans, will systematically identify and address gender discrimination and inequality, and promote gender equality. All programmes developed under these plans will mainstream gender equality. This will include:

- A gender and power situation analysis as an essential part of all programme designs;
- Programmes include objectives, indicators, strategies, activities, targets and results that promote gender equality;
- Programmes include a gender-sensitive risk analysis as well as risk reduction and mitigation strategies to identify potential areas of resistance to greater gender equality and to assure that they are appropriately addressed in the programme design;
- Programme design includes mechanisms for tracking and sharing lessons in promoting gender equality;
- Monitoring, evaluation and research frameworks that include the collection of data disaggregated by sex and age;
- Adequate human and financial resources for the effective promotion of gender justice are allocated in all programmes.

Area 3: Partnerships

- Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone will work in collaboration with a range of partners at all levels as an effective strategy to promote gender equality and child rights.
- Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone will assess its engagement in partnerships, coalitions and alliances on the basis of shared commitments to gender equality, and will use its voice in networks and alliances to influence change in groups that do not yet share this commitment.
- Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone investment in capacity building among partners will include training in performing gender analyses and in mainstreaming gender equality.

Area 4: Advocacy and Campaigns

- Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone will integrate the objective of gender equality in policy advocacy and dialogue, addressing gender gaps and unequal power relationships that exist for girls and boys. Advocacy programmes will strengthen the capacity of girls and boys, women and men to advocate for gender equality across all levels of society.

Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone will work to ensure that gender analyses are included in CRC monitoring and shadow reports, and that national data statistical mechanisms develop greater specificity for collecting and analyzing gender-disaggregated data.

- Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone will actively support the periodic and/or alternative reporting mechanisms to CEDAW and other regional and global instruments on the human rights of women and girls.

Area 5: Public Engagement and Communications

- All marketing, fundraising, sponsorship, campaigns, global education and media messages will communicate and reflect our commitment to gender equality.
- Advocacy Initiative for Development Sierra Leone communications will employ gender sensitive and inclusive language and images, and avoid gender stereotypes.

Definitions

Gender

The concept of gender refers to the norms, expectations and beliefs about the roles, relations and values attributed to girls and boys, women and men. These norms are socially constructed, they are neither invariable nor are they biologically determined. They change over time. They are learned from families and friends, in schools and communities, and from the media, government and religious organizations. Gender equity Gender equity means being fair to women and men, girls and boys. To ensure fairness, measures are put into place to address social or historical discrimination and disadvantages faced by girls relative to boys. A gender equity approach ensures equitable access to, and control of the resources and benefits of development through targeted measures. Scholarships for girls are one example of an equity approach that contributes to all children, boys and girls, accessing school and equally benefiting from education opportunities. Increased gender equity is only one part of a strategy that contributes to gender equality.

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Gender equality

Gender equality means that women and men, girls and boys enjoy the same status in society; have the same entitlements to all human rights; enjoy the same level of respect in the community; can take advantage of the same opportunities to make choices about their lives; and have the same amount of power to shape the outcomes of these choices. Gender equality does not mean that women and men, or girls and boys are the same. Women and men, girls and boys have different but related needs and priorities, face different constraints, and enjoy different opportunities. Their relative positions in society are based on standards that, while not fixed, tend to advantage men and boys and disadvantage women and girls. Consequently, they are affected in different ways by policies and programmes. A gender equality approach is about understanding these relative differences, appreciating that they are not rigid but can be changed, and then designing policies, programmes and services with these differences in mind. Ultimately, promoting gender equality means transforming the power relations between women and men, girls and boys in order to create a more just society for all.

Gender justice

The concept of gender justice underlines the role of duty bearers for the rights of girls and boys. Gender justice is the ending of inequalities between females and males, that result in women and girls subordination to men and boys. It implies that girls and boys, men and women have equal access to and control over resources, the ability to make choices in their lives, as well as access to provisions to redress inequalities, as needed. A commitment to gender justice means taking a position against gender discrimination, exclusion and gender-based violence. It focuses on the responsibility to hold duty bearers accountable to respect, protect and fulfill human rights, particularly of girls and women.

Gender discrimination

Gender discrimination describes the situation in which people are treated differently simply because they are male or female, rather than on the basis of their individual skills or capabilities. For example, social exclusion, inability to participate in decision-making processes, and restricted access to and control of services and resources are common results of discrimination. When this discrimination is part of the social order it is called systemic gender discrimination. For instance in some communities, families routinely choose to provide higher education for their sons but keep their daughters at home to help with domestic work. Systemic discrimination has social and political roots and needs to be addressed at many different levels of programming.

Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are socially constructed and unquestioned beliefs about the different characteristics, roles and relations of women and men that are seen as true and un-changeable. Gender stereotypes are reproduced and re-enforced through processes such as the education and upbringing of girls and boys, as well as the influence of media. In many societies girls are taught to be responsive, emotional, subservient, and indecisive while boys, learn to be assertive, fearless and independent. Gender stereotyping occurs when such characteristics are persistently attributed to the roles and identities of males and females in society. Gender stereotyping shapes people's attitudes, behaviors and decisions. It locks girls and boys into behavioral patterns that prevent them from developing to their full potential and realizing their rights. Gender stereotyping can lead to social exclusion of those who do not fit the stereotype.

Empowerment

Power is the ability to shape one's life and one's environment. The lack of power is one of the main barriers that prevent girls and women from realizing their rights and escaping cycles of poverty. This can be overcome by a strategy of empowerment. Gender-based empowerment involves building girls' assets (social, economic, political and personal), strengthening girls' ability to make choices about their future, and developing girls' sense of self worth and their belief in their own ability to control their lives.

Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is the promotion of gender equality into all aspects of an organization's work and into its systems and procedures. It is a process that addresses what an organization does (external mainstreaming) and how an organization works (internal mainstreaming). Gender mainstreaming means that all policies, programmes, as well as organizational and management processes are designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated taking into account the different and relative needs and constraints of girls, boys, women and men with the aim of promoting gender equality. The goal of gender mainstreaming is to make sure that women, men, girls and boys realize their rights and that inequality is not perpetuated.

Gender gap

The gender gap is a measurement of inequality that shows the unequal distribution of opportunities, resources or outcomes between men and women, boys and girls. Gender gaps are usually revealed through the analysis of gender-disaggregated statistics that illustrate the extent of inequalities.

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence refers to physical, sexual, psychological and sometimes economic violence inflicted on a person because of being male or female. Girls and women are most frequently the targets of gender-based violence, but it also affects boys and men, especially those who do not fit dominant male stereotypes of behavior or appearance. Gender-based violence may refer to criminal acts of aggression committed by individuals, or to socially sanctioned violence that may even be committed by State authorities. Among these are human rights infringements such as domestic violence, trafficking of girls or boys, female genital cutting or violence against men who have sex with men.

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Note – This policy was adopted from Plan International Policy on Gender Equality that was published 2011.

