

Gender and Equity Policy

2020

Rationale

Across the globe and within the Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) region, gender inequality continues to be one of the most challenging issues cutting across social, environmental, and economic dimensions of societies. Unequal power relations supported by enduring structural inequalities curtail the decision-making rights and control over resources of women and people in disadvantaged groups, despite their shouldering both productive and reproductive work.

Existing policies and programmes often ignore structural aspects of gender and social relations, resulting in technocratic approaches prioritising economic efficiency, for instance, without fully addressing unequal power relations. For women, this manifests in continued unequal wages for equal work and unequal work burdens with primary responsibilities for domestic work. Policies often ignore the fact that gender differences intersect with other dimensions of social differentiation such as class, caste, ethnicity, and age, which also intersect with different geographical settings such as upstream, midstream, and downstream, creating multiple forms of exclusions. Unequal power relations based on gender and social factors, impact the rights and access to and control over resources for women and socially disadvantaged groups. This leaves them poorer, less educated and excluded from decision-making processes.

As an intergovernmental organization, ICIMOD is committed to positively influencing policies and programmes of its regional member countries (RMCs), to strive towards gender equality and inclusive growth.

Gender refers to the socio-culturally and political-economically constructed roles and responsibilities ascribed to women and men that change over time, are contextually and historically specific, and are inseparable from power relations. It also refers to a domain of characteristic that shape the value, status, and access to resources of women and men within different societies

Gender equality is the measurable equal representation of women and men. Gender equality does not imply that women and men are the same, but that they have equal value and should be accorded treatment, opportunities, and benefits.

Reproductive work: Work and activities that involve childbearing and caring as well as care services within households that support family's wellbeing, such as cooking, cleaning, fetching water, washing and attending to the sick and elderly. These responsibilities are performed by women and children, and have low value.

Productive work: Work related to activities that produce goods and services for consumption or trade. Both men and women can be involved in these activities. However, women often carry out this work in the household farm or family enterprise, alongside their reproductive work, which makes their contribution less visible and less valued than men's productive work.

This document outlines ICIMOD's Gender and Equity Policy which acts in support of ICIMOD's [mission and vision](#). To fully achieve the Centre's mission, it is essential to ensure meaningful participation from women, men, and children across its work. ICIMOD considers gender and equity centrally in its work, embraces a gender transformative approach in striving towards the goal of gender equality and to ensure women and men benefit equally from its work. It operationalizes this policy through Gender Action Plans (GAPs) which include gender specific objectives, activities, and indicators, as well as timelines and resources required. The GAPs also act as monitoring mechanisms to (a) ensure funds for gender work; (b) ensure partners focus on activities related to gender equality and social inclusion; and (c) track progress on gender equality and social inclusion.

Commitment

This document puts forward a policy applicable across the Centre's work, both within the organization and in collaboration with partners, to promote people-centered gender-equitable sustainable mountain development. ICIMOD commits to implementing this policy and ensuring its integration with other existing institutional policies, strategies, procedures, including:

- i) [Strategy and Results Framework](#)
- ii) [Partnership Strategy](#)
- iii) [Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework](#)
- iv) [Risk Management Strategy](#)
- v) [Human Resources Policy](#)
- vi) [Policy on Prevention and Redressal of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace](#)

Background

Gender inequalities hinder the achievement of sustainable development and environments and thus significant global meets¹ have asserted the need to make gender equality a global priority. International instruments² have been in place for decades while

some more recent efforts by United Nations entities have successfully integrated gender into their global policies³ and goals⁴. ICIMOD acknowledges these international instruments, policies and goals and commits itself to implementing gender transformative approaches through all of its work. ICIMOD also recognizes that gender bias, coupled with other social, cultural, political, and economic inequalities based on identity characteristics such as class, caste, ethnicity, race, language, and age present intersectional challenges to achieving both women's rights and human rights.

Gender bias means making decisions based on gender that result in favouring one gender over the other, which often results in contexts that favour men and/or boys over women and/or girls; for example, family decisions that boys should get preference over girls for education

Over its history, ICIMOD has been engaged in the topic of gender and inclusive development. Since 1995, when the Centre engaged for the first time a Gender and Social Development Expert, ICIMOD has promoted gender equity in mountain development by raising awareness and conducting trainings in its RMCs by supporting networking of mountain women; by organizing two major global gatherings on gender and mountains – Bhutan+10: Gender and Sustainable Mountain Development in a Changing World in 2012 and Celebrating Mountain Women in 2002; by producing, publishing, and disseminating knowledge on gender issues; and by introducing innovations such as its internal Gender Innovations Award; its roster of experts on women, gender, environment, and mountains; its mandatory gender sensitivity training for all staff followed by reflection sessions; its women's leadership trainings; and its regular gender auditing. Gender issues and equity have been progressively integrated into ICIMOD's

¹ For instance, the International Conference on Population and Development, 1994, declared that equality and empowerment of women is a global priority and an essential step towards eradicating poverty and stabilizing population growth; the Beijing Platform for Action, 1995, provides a blueprint that includes gender analysis of problems and opportunities in 12 critical areas of concern, and clear and specific standards for actions to be implemented by governments, the UN system, and civil society.

² Including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979

³ The UN Framework for Climate Change in 2010 was the first global climate change policy to include multiple references to gender equality. In 2012, a decision was adopted by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) promoting gender balance and improving the participation of women in UNFCCC negotiations. This included mechanisms to track progress toward gender balance; the inclusion of gender equality and climate change as a standing item on future Conference of Parties (COP) agendas; the organization of a workshop on gender balance in the UNFCCC process at COP 19; and gender-sensitive climate policy and capacity building activities to promote greater participation of women in the UNFCCC process.

⁴ Specifically, Sustainable Development Goal 5, which is to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," acknowledges that gender inequality constitutes most persistent and widespread forms of injustice. It aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women in the public and private spheres and to undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources and access to ownership of property.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, targeted strategies, policies, and measures must often be available to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating at a level playing field. Equity leads to equality.

programmes over time through the establishment of a Gender Unit in 2002, the Gender Resource Team (GReaT) in 2006, a Gender and Governance Division in 2007, a Gender strategic institutional area in 2012, the development of gender action plans (GAPs) in 2018, the inclusion of gender and inclusive development as one of the strategic results in the Centre's Medium-Term Action Plan (MTAP) IV, and the development and approval of the Policy and Procedures on Prevention and Redressal of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace in 2019. The 2007 Gender Equity Policy was revisited and strengthened in 2013 to align with the Centre's Strategic Framework 2012 and its MTAP III (2013–2017). In 2019, the policy was revised and strengthened again to reflect new steps taken by the Centre and to ensure alignment with the MTAP IV (2018-2022) and international standards.

Progress has been made in recent years in terms of action-oriented research, enhanced knowledge,⁵ strengthened capacities and women's leadership skills, expanded gender networks, and institutional mechanisms for addressing gender issues. The Centre is committed to gender transformative change and is working to achieve this through four pillars conceptualized in 2012: i) gender integrative and focused research, ii) gender positive organizational change, iii) capacity strengthening and women's leadership, and iv) impact through gender-inclusive policies and partnerships.

Given the current context of accelerated socio-economic and climate change marginalized communities and groups (e.g., women, the poor, the elderly, and the differently abled) are more exposed to climatic risks and hence more vulnerable to resultant shocks. Structural inequalities render women particularly vulnerable, and climate change can exacerbate these existing gender-based inequities. Therefore, ICIMOD has focused on ensuring that financing and budgeting approaches are sensitive to the gendered aspects of climate change impacts.

⁵ The ICIMOD digital repository [HimalDoc](#) makes available all of our gender-related publications which are open access and freely available for download.

Challenges

The nature and pace of global, economic, sociocultural, and environmental changes, including climate change, have differential impacts on the livelihoods and wellbeing of women, men, and children. Their adaptive capacities to these accelerated changes depend on their access to and control over resources, knowledge, and services, along with meaningful engagement with development and governance institutions. Resilient responses are shaped by gender divisions of roles; differential property ownership traditions constricted for women and expanded for men; and the limited manner in which development organizations perceive and value gendered knowledge, agency and experiences.

Women and men must also be able to make and own their choices and exercise control over assets. Experience has shown that women and men manage and cope with new realities in different ways due to socially-constructed norms and relations of power that shape their roles and responsibilities, access and control over resources, knowledge, skills, and behaviours. In our rapidly changing world, finance and financing processes are emerging critical issues with major gendered implications. Financial inclusion and access to financial services are important to building women's and men's adaptive capacities over the long term. Although progress has been made in the area of finance and investment, particularly in terms of gender inclusiveness in multilateral climate funds, access to finance is still very gendered, with women and the very poor facing greater barriers, and often more so in rural areas.

Practical gender needs are those that relate to living conditions, are practical in nature and are usually related to inadequacies of living conditions such as water provision, healthcare and employment. They include such things as provision of taps, health posts, and schools. These needs tend to be immediate necessities. They do not challenge gender divisions of labour or women's subordinate position in society.

Strategic needs are the needs women identify because of their subordinate position in society and tend to challenge gender divisions of labour, power and control, and traditionally defined norms and values. These needs may include issues such as legal rights, equal wage, domestic violence and women's control over their bodies.

Across the HKH, diversity in cultural contexts and national capacities often compel the use of different strategies to increase women’s and men’s access to and control over political-economic, sociocultural and natural resources, as well as equitable and meaningful participation in development initiatives, and decision and policy making. To address these challenges and to ensure sustainable development through interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary approaches that will benefit women and men equally, this policy lays out a long-term goal to address the practical and strategic needs of women, men, and children in the HKH region.

Objectives

ICIMOD envisions a future shaped by gender transformative change – change that goes beyond identifying and exploring the symptoms of gender inequality to seeking change of the socially constructed norms, attitudes, and the relations of power that underlie them. Gender transformative change promises a future where women are not disproportionately affected by environmental challenges, where women and men have equal livelihood opportunities, where women and men have equal voices in decision and policy making at all levels, and where both women’s and men’s needs and knowledge are taken into account in all policy and practice.

Empowerment describes both the process and outcome of people (women and men) taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills or having their skills and knowledge recognized, increasing self-confidence, solving problems, and developing self-reliance. Empowerment implies an expansion in women’s (or men’s) ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. The gender norms that shape current unequal relations and practices can be changed through this process, leading to more equitable relationships between men and women

The specific objectives of this policy are:

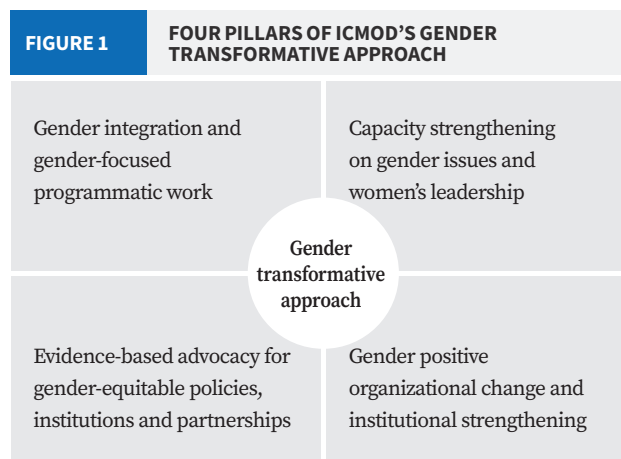
1. To ensure and guide gender integration and focus in all of the Centre’s work
2. To promote equitable and meaningful participation of both women and men at all levels of sustainable mountain development and policy making

3. To promote the respect and upholding of equal rights and equitable access to and control over resources and benefits for women and men
4. To strengthen the capacities and empowerment of women, including leaders, decision makers, knowledge producers, and members of local communities

These objectives frame this policy and aim the Centre towards goals of gender equality through its work and in its internal operations.

ICIMOD’s Gender Transformative Approach

The Gender Transformative Approach (GTA) adopted by the Centre is aimed towards overcoming persisting inequalities by not only identifying gender gaps and inequalities, but by also addressing discriminatory social and gender norms, practices, attitudes, and relations of power. As illustrated in Figure 1, it comprises four pillars of (1) gender integration and gender-focused programmatic work; (2) capacity strengthening on gender issues and women’s leadership; (3) evidence-based advocacy for gender-equitable policies, institutions and partnerships; and (4) gender-positive organizational change and institutional strengthening. Through its GTA, ICIMOD aims not only to improve the conditions of women, but also to improve their status and positions.



1. Gender integration and gender-focused programmatic work

ICIMOD is committed to promoting the production, documentation, and sharing of gender-focused research, analysis, and integrative knowledge on gender issues in the HKH region through gender-focused work, and through the integration of gender dimensions and analysis into all its work to contribute to gender-positive impacts and transformative outcomes. Thus, gender is integrated and considered in:

- All phases of programme design, development, and implementation
- Communications and partnership arrangements
- Monitoring and evaluation through the development of gender indicators
- Allocation of resources, expertise, and budgets

2. Capacity strengthening on gender issues and women's leadership

ICIMOD is committed to strengthening capacity on gender issues, awareness, analysis, and women's leadership to support women's empowerment and gender equality in the HKH region by:

- Developing approaches to address gendered vulnerabilities and capacities to adapt to change
- Supporting partners and ICIMOD staff in understanding gender issues and strengthening women's leadership skills

3. Evidence-based advocacy for gender-equitable policies, institutions, and partnerships

ICIMOD is committed to strengthening networks and partnerships, and advocating policies for gender equality to enhance wellbeing and sustainable development through:

- Establishing and maintaining staff resources in a Gender Resource Team (GReaT) and the Gender Strategic Institutional Area
- Raising awareness, supporting networks, and strengthening the capacities of partners and RMCs to address gender issues
- Providing greater visibility to gender and mountain development issues in the HKH at international platforms, conventions, conferences, and dialogues

4. Gender-positive organizational change and institutional strengthening

ICIMOD is committed to building institutional capacities and bringing about positive organizational change for women's empowerment and gender equality through:

- Promoting equity in decision-making processes, recruitment and promotion processes, human resource development and training, and

administrative and functional areas aimed at improving gender balance at all staff levels, especially in decision-making professional and leadership positions

- Promoting and fostering a gender-sensitive workplace environment based on gender-positive attitudes and behaviours, including gender-sensitive grievance processes against discrimination and sexual harassment
- Ensuring accountability among all staff in promoting gender equality to uphold positive change

Accountability

All staff bear the responsibility for upholding this policy, fostering a gender-responsive and inclusive working environment, and ensuring the integration of gender issues across all of the Centre's work. Specifically,

The Director General is responsible for:

- Ensuring effective implementation of this policy in the Centre's work and internally
- Ensuring adequate funding and human resources to achieve the objectives described in this policy
- Promoting gender equality and social inclusion in all of ICIMOD's policies, programmes, and management structures
- Promoting the equitable representation of women and men in committees and at decision-making levels
- Promoting a gender-sensitive workplace free of discrimination, bias, sexual harassment, and abuse of power;
- Promoting an inclusive organizational culture and interdisciplinary integration towards gender equality

The Directorate is responsible for:

- Promoting gender equality and social inclusion within the organization and in partnerships
- Promoting gender equality and fairness in the recruitment, development, and management of human resources, and all functional administrative support and finance areas
- Ensuring adequate provisions for staff training and supporting the development of institutional mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating staff

knowledge and competence about gender equity and sensitivity

- Ensuring that stakeholder engagement and country consultations are conducted in an inclusive and gender-responsive manner
- Developing processes to support and select project partners that promote women's and marginalized groups' participation and leadership
- Share knowledge and learning on gender equality and develop internal and partner capacity on gender issues

Other administrative units and senior management are responsible for:

- Applying a gender-responsive approach throughout the identification, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all projects
- Integrating into the Theory of Change and other programme development processes relevant information on gender dimensions
- Collecting and disaggregating data, information during the entire project cycle
- Planning and budgeting adequate gender expertise to support gender integrative and focused research, analysis, knowledge generation and publications work
- Coordinating with the Gender Team to generate and share knowledge on good practices, methodologies, and lessons learnt on promoting gender equality
- Ensuring gender focus and gender-sensitive language in communications and knowledge products
- Monitoring and evaluating gender-positive outcomes, budgets, and gender-specific challenges across the Centre's work
- Ensuring that women and men staff have equal opportunities for professional promotions, development and resources
- Strengthening staff capacity to understand, address, and champion gender issues in their work

The Gender Strategic Institutional Area is responsible for:

- Supporting all gender-related work in the Centre by providing inputs and expertise where required; presenting the Centre's gender-related work externally; and pursuing a research agenda focusing on gender issues relevant to the regional member countries and other relevant emerging issues
- Coordinating with all units across the Centre to ensure gender focus, rigour and quality of gender analysis across the Centre's work
- Providing training on gender sensitivity internally and with partners when appropriate
- Identifying and facilitating the exchange of best practices and success stories from across the regional member countries

The Gender Resource Team (GReaT) is responsible for:

- Promoting internal gender-positive and sensitive organizational change, through sharing experiences and best practices on gender issues, equity, and inclusion across the Centre's working environment and work
- Supporting gender awareness, planning, monitoring, and capacity of staff and partners on gender issues, and supporting the Gender Team in special events and initiatives

Staff are responsible for:

- Adopting approaches that promote gender equality in the workplace
- Advocating gender equality within and outside the organization to reflect ICIMOD's commitment to women's empowerment, gender transformative change, and gender equality

Monitoring, complaints and oversight

The institutional, programme and initiative level GAPs are the primary mechanism for monitoring the Centre's progress towards its gender and equity aims, although individual partnership agreements also include due diligence mechanisms and language ensuring partner focus on gender aspects of the work. Gender discrimination or bias in the work is covered within the Human Resources Policy while sexual harassment issues are comprehensively addressed in the Centre's Policy on Prevention and

Redressal of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace and operationalized within the Procedure for Prevention and Redressal of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace.

Any and all grievances related to gender inequality related to ICIMOD's work are accepted through the grievance reporting mechanism and addressed

Gender discrimination refers to “any discrimination, 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 (or men), irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of women and men, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, social, cultural, civil, or any other field” (United Nations, 1979. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, Article 1) Discrimination can stem from law (de jure) or from practice (de facto)

through a redressal mechanism. Any stakeholder with any concern related to failure to properly implement this policy may file a complaint by filling out the [online complaint form](#) or by sending an email to scu@icimod.org, who will ensure compliance with the redressal mechanism in a timely, transparent, fair, and equitable manner. Any all grievances reported to the Centre are reported to the Board of Governors, including data on number of cases, types of allegations, and summary of the status and actions taken.