

Action Lesotho Gender Equality Policy

Introduction and background:

Action Lesotho's gender equality policy is informed through analyses of development activities and programmes for over forty years now that draw attention to the significant importance of recognising and addressing gender relations in working towards sustainable development. It is also cognisant of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which states that 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights' (Article 1). In every society men, women, boys and girls occupy differing positions of power that intersect with expectations about them that cross all aspects of their lives. This includes assumptions that are present within and across households, communities, work environments, and cultures. Recognising and critically analysing the gendered norms and expectations that are present in any context, is, therefore, a crucial factor in designing and implementing successful development interventions that contribute towards enhancing the dignity of all and achieving greater levels of equality.

Action Lesotho's understanding of gender draws upon gender and development (GAD) analysis and views gender as a dynamic process through which the lives of women and men are played out within a set of hierarchical power relations that normalise differential expectations, opportunities as well as their social and economic outcomes, based on culturally sanctioned gendered identities and expectations. Our perspective on equality recognises that identifying and addressing difference is key to supporting and empowering people living in poverty. Our ambition in achieving gender equality is that gender be mainstreamed across all our areas of activity.

Data from Lesotho informs us that women are major contributors to their households through their active participation in the agricultural labour force of which they form a majority of agricultural labourers, through their involvement in livestock production, home gardens and non-farm activities. However, on top of their productive contributions women have major responsibilities in household management as well as household and community care, resulting in time poverty for women and girls. Moreover, it is stated that women's low status within and outside of households and poor levels of decision making power in has resulted in 'higher female HIV/AIDS prevalence rate, high fertility, infant and maternal mortality [and] HIV/AIDS is now recognised as the most critical development challenges in Lesotho as evidenced by deepening poverty, intensification of gender inequalities, erosion of

achievements in human development as well as the ability of the government to maintain essential services'. (Pitamber and Tadesse, 2005: iii). Research on Lesotho also draws our attention to the legacy that a history of migrant working patterns have had on household composition and responsibilities and economic engagement as well as the disadvantaged position that the practice of herding has on boys' access to education, training and, ultimately, their vulnerability to poverty.

Action Lesotho's aims and areas of work

Action Lesotho works in the Maputsoe area of Lesotho. The goal of Action Lesotho's Strategic Plan 2015-2020 is to 'break the cycle of poverty' for a minimum of 1,000 people in the Maputsoe area and to build capacity, both locally and in conjunction with national partners, to enable others to break the cycle of poverty throughout Lesotho. It is now widely recognised that causes and experiences of poverty are multi-dimensional and intersect with factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, caste, religion and geographical location. Together, these factors shape the root of poverty and the extent, types of poverty people experience (Chronic Poverty Report 2008).

Action Lesotho's activities in Lesotho are based firmly in the widely accepted principles that addressing poverty is achieved by providing **Resources**, building **Capacity**, working in **Partnership** with local communities and agencies, **Empowering** communities and individuals, and giving them **Ownership** of the development process. These are interlinked concepts and processes, and to have a sustainable impact on poverty, all five need to be addressed, either by ourselves or by other organisations. Our belief is that, in order to achieve long-lasting change and improvements in people's lives, underlying causes of poverty, including unequal power relations, and the inter-relationships between economic and social vulnerabilities must be identified and addressed.

Exploration of, and engagement with, local, regional and national institutions is therefore, promoted across our four main project areas. These are:

- (i) the development of an agricultural project that demonstrates the possibility of attaining consistently high agricultural outputs, and offers associated skills development within the locality;
- (ii) the development of business acumen and skills in promoting trade in Lesotho craftwork;
- (iii) engagement with civil society through the provision of services at community levels;

(iv) ongoing humanitarian support for the most needy in the community

Gender equality policy in practice

It is considered that the process of identifying and coming together to address challenges is a central task; that the developing of a critical perspective in problem solving is of major importance and that identifying and addressing gendered practices, norms and assumptions are fundamental to this process. To this end we are promoting process driven activities such as 'Training for Trainers' and 'Training for Transformation'; these activities provide the key skills for problem solving and lateral thinking. This process facilitates the identification and critical analysis of gendered norms and expectations and will contribute to developing strategies to challenge oppressive structures that limit people's lives. It is, therefore, a crucial factor in designing and implementing successful development interventions that contribute towards enhancing the dignity of all and achieving greater levels of equality.

In ensuring that Action Lesotho's gender policy is embedded into practice we will ensure that gender issues are considered in all aspects of our programmes, from planning through to development, delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

Our agriculture, enterprise, engagement with civil society and humanitarian activities will be designed in accordance with this policy.

Gender will be a cross cutting issue in our dialogue and process driven approaches to development.

Best practice in identifying and addressing gender issues will also be central to both the governance of Action Lesotho and to our external partnerships.

Monitoring and evaluation processes will incorporate gender aggregated data.