

# The Leprosy Mission Sweden's policy on gender equality between women and men

Approved by the board of the Leprosy Missions Sweden (TLMS) 2015-11-28

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Overall goal of the policy

The gender policy describes TLMS's view on equality between women and men and how it is included in TLMS's work. Through the policy, TLMS aims to create conditions for knowing what kind of approach, decision making and programme planning is needed to work against gender based discrimination and contribute to equality between women and men.

### 1.2 Background and reasons for the policy

The overall objective of the work performed by TLMS will be powerful sources of change towards a just and reconciled world. Many societies and organisations are characterised by a patriarchal view that gives men greater power and resources. There is a risk that this view leads to the marginalisation or even denial of women's influence, needs and rights. TLMS will emphasise the importance of a rights-based perspective for both women and men when designing suitable strategies to influence change.

TLMS through its local TLM partners, have a unique opportunity to be active in their communities in changing attitudes between women and men and to promote each individual's potential for positive development. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) from 1979, gives a basis for ensuring equal rights for women and men. The Convention raises the issue of the responsibility of governments through legislation and practice, to eliminate the discrimination of women based on gender. Sweden was one of the first countries to ratify the Convention that came into force in 1981.

## 2. TLMS's view of gender equality

### 2.1 Definitions

**Equality for women and men:** Women and men have the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities.

**Gender:** The cultural and social interpretation and understanding of gender and the biological differences between the genders.

**Gender analysis:** Is the method used to understand how the living conditions, rights and opportunities of women and men are lived out in a specific group or society. Gender analysis also helps in understanding the dynamism the category of women or men where large variations can be seen and where it is important to understand gender in relation to other factors such as economy, status (class), ethnicity, age, family relationships, religion etc. It includes also an understanding of what norms and ideals for women and men are accepted by a society. Implementing a gender analysis can be a part of including a gender perspective in the work.

## **2.1 Challenges**

### **Education**

Equipping and educating women is most often necessary for them to have access to areas that are generally dominated by men. When women and men have equal responsibility for providing sufficient income for their families and maintaining the home, it can often lead to women having the opportunity of being actively involved in society and for men to experience the positive aspects of a close relationship with his children and other family members as well as influencing the household work.

### **Rights**

A rights-based approach is based on the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights that was ratified by the UN General Assembly in 1948. In all instances of development cooperation and community development, there is the mission to work for the respect, protection and achievement of human rights. Fundamentally, every person is born with the same value and rights. Working with gender-based discrimination and for gender equality the principles of non-discrimination are absolutely central. The challenge is then to change or at least question practices that discriminate or are harmful. An example is to work with dialogue and strengthening women's capacity in order for them to influence policies, legislation and lobbying for their rights.

### **Religion**

Both women and men should be able to freely choose their own religious preference and traditions. Girls and women's living standards are particularly negatively influenced by lack of religious freedom in the form of laws they are forced to practice. Examples are education, jobs, inheritance and access to maternity health services that women often have limited access to. When working towards gender equality within a religious institution or denomination it is necessary to identify the roles women and men have and their responsibilities in carrying out their religion's rituals and traditions according to their scriptures. Areas to highlight are leadership roles, participation in religious observances, carrying out certain rites and girls and boys religious education.

Religious leaders usually have a great deal of power and legitimacy that is an advantage when used to influence attitudes that strengthen gender equality but a disadvantage when it contributes to repressing equality. A challenge is therefore to encourage and strengthen religious leaders to actively promote gender equality and non-discrimination.

### **Violence and misuse of power**

Violence is often an expression for the desire for power over people and in many cases it is primarily women who are the most affected. Certain situations demand particular attention, for example, when women and children are exposed to rape or sexual harassment in the home or forced into prostitution in the public arena. Armed conflict worsens these situations where women are victims of violence particularly sexual violence.

### **Hiv and aids**

Equality between women and men is a central issue in all work with Hiv and must involve both women and men particularly in preventing the spread of Hiv. TLMS will promote a stronger connection between working with gender equality and reducing Hiv and aids.

There is inequality between women and men within different spheres of society: the work place, access to education, the right to own property, the right to inheritance, the right to decide over one's own life (for example, choice of marriage partner and giving birth, freedom of movement, freedom to belong to a political party and religion) that can hinder a balanced development that benefits both men and women. Therefore promoting long-term change for gender equality should be implemented parallel on many different levels.

### **3. Principles and approach for working with gender equality within TLMS**

#### **Involve both men and women**

Both men and women should be involved in working with gender equality. Previously efforts were often directed only to women aiming to strengthen their role and possibility to influence their society. This is of course important, but for long-term sustainability in ensuring equality between women and men and reducing gender-based discrimination, it is necessary that both women and men participate.

#### **Living what we teach**

TLMS shall be role model in both word and actions concerning gender equality.

#### **Working on different levels in society**

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#### **Handling complexity**

Gender equality is a complex issue in a global context regarding how the roles of women and men are understood. All efforts towards gender equality must consider the specific cultural and social context where an intervention is to be carried out otherwise there is a risk that that these efforts will be counter-productive.

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### **4. Guidelines for TLMS's work with gender equality**

- All TLMS's work shall include a conscious and consequent approach to gender equality.
- All communication and development cooperation programs that have Sida funding shall include a gender perspective.
- Participate in networks that promote cooperation for gender equality in Sweden and the south.
- Promote that dialogue takes place on a continual basis between organisations in the south where gender issues are considered from a religious perspective including both women and men.