



## GENDER POLICY

Version 2.1 | 2024

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Independent, private and non-profit, Acted respects a strict political and religious impartiality, and operates following principles of neutrality, non-discrimination, transparency, according to its core values: responsibility, impact, enterprising-spirit and inspiration.

Acted is committed to immediate humanitarian relief to support those in urgent need and protect people's dignity, while co-creating longer term opportunities for sustainable growth and fulfilling people's potential. Acted endeavours to respond to humanitarian crises and build resilience; promote inclusive and sustainable growth; co-construct effective governance and support the building of civil society worldwide by investing in people and their potential.

The commitment of Acted is guided by 4 core values:

- **Responsibility:** We ensure the efficient and responsible delivery of humanitarian aid with the means and resources that have been entrusted to us.
- **Impact:** We are committed to having the most sustainable impact for the communities and the people with whom we engage.
- **Enterprising spirit:** We are enterprising and engage in our work with a spirit that creates value and overcomes challenges.
- **Inspiration:** We strive to inspire all those around us through our vision, values, approaches, choices, practice, actions and advocacy.

## A. POLICY STATEMENT

Tackling all forms of inequity, including gender inequality, is crucial for sustainable and peaceful development. Gender inequality is about unequal power relations between women and men leading to unequal opportunities to live in dignity and develop oneself to one's full potential. For Acted, working on gender means working with women, men, girls, and boys from different backgrounds, and to promote gender equality. By addressing gender inequality, more balanced power distribution between men and women will be reached, and the rights of women and girls, as well as men and boys, enhanced.

In line with SDG #5, which confirmed gender equality as a universally recognised core development objective, and the shared belief that gender equality is a fundamental human right, Acted is committed to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.<sup>1</sup> To this end, this policy serves to remove structural barriers to gender equality, and challenge the distribution of resources and allocation of duties between men and women within Acted, and within the framework of all our programming.

The policy is aimed at guiding Acted staff and the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, and must be considered together with:

- Acted's Code of Conduct;
- Acted's Grievance Policy;
- Acted's Policy against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment;
- Acted's Child Protection Policy;
- Acted's Conflict of Interest Prevention Policy;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

- Acted's Data Protection Policy;
- Acted's Anti-fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy;
- Acted's Anti-Terrorism and Anti-money laundering Policy
- Acted's Environmental and Social Protection Policy;
- Acted's procedures, manuals (e.g. Finance, Logistics, Administration & Human Resources, Security & Safety), handbooks (e.g. Transparency & Compliance, Appraisal, Monitoring & Evaluation, Project Management, Project Development) and charters (e.g. Use of Information Systems);
- Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, of which Acted is a signatory;
- U.N. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Protection from Sexual Abuse Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crisis, specifically the updated *Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action* and the guidance document *Different Needs, Equal Opportunities: Women, Girls, Boys and Men in the Humanitarian Program Cycle (HPC)*
- U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably *Goal 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*

## B. ACTED'S PRINCIPLES OF GENDER EQUALITY

Acted understands that gender variables impact the social vulnerability of women and men, girls and boys. The disproportionate effects of economic and social marginalisation of women and girls has resulted in a “feminisation of poverty”.<sup>2</sup> This is particularly true in a crisis, where gender norms can influence an individual or group's capacity to cope. Women are often the hardest hit in a crisis, as they tend to have fewer economic and social resources to draw on than men and face specific vulnerabilities in contexts where gender norms restrict access to livelihoods opportunities. Women, girls, and boys are at particular risk of violence in displacement settings. For such reasons, humanitarian relief and sustainable development efforts must understand and address the specific vulnerabilities and priorities of women, men, girls, and boys if they are to be effective.

Acted has, since its inception, been a woman-led organisation, from top to bottom<sup>3</sup>, and remains committed to pursuing women's advancement and empowerment, and gender equality, through the following approaches:

### 1. Programming

- To apply international standards and best practices in gender throughout the programme cycle: from needs assessment; to programme design; to implementation; and monitoring and evaluation, to ensure that the specific needs of all, especially women, men, boys, and girls are understood and addressed;
- To ensure that all women and girls are empowered through engagement with Acted programmes.

### 2. Organisational Management

- To provide a positive work environment based on a mutual respect and understanding, with a zero-tolerance approach to gender discrimination, in line with the organisational Code of Conduct;
- To provide a safe work environment, with clear accountability mechanisms to prevent and protect against sexual and gender-based discrimination, and a Grievance Policy and mechanism through which such cases are addressed;

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/session/presskit/fs1.htm>

<sup>3</sup> In 2021: 55% of Acted's international staff are women; and 46% of international management positions (Grades 1-3) are occupied by women.

- To create a work environment which supports gender-related programming goals, and which recognises and fosters the contributions and potential of all staff and volunteers, irrespective of their gender;
- To create a conducive environment for female job candidates to apply to the organisation, to be treated equitably in recruitment decisions, and to ensure equal access to career opportunities at all levels within the organisation, free from discrimination;
- To continue to monitor the gender balance of the organisational workforce, through the annual Gender Balance Report;
- To raise awareness of gender equality to promote and encourage a general understanding of gender-related challenges and to foster communication and information exchange so as to improve mutual understanding and learning about gender (in)equality.

### 3. Public Engagement

- To communicate the organisation's commitment to achieving gender equality consistently and coherently
- To highlight the specific gendered requirements of working towards a Zero Carbon; Zero Exclusion; Zero Poverty world.

### 4. Partnerships

- To build and maintain partnerships with civil society groups, notably women's groups; donors; private actors; partner organisations; and government agencies that share Acted's values and are supportive of the organisation's commitment to achieving gender equality;
- To promote partnerships with actors working for women's full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, to ensure equal access to and equal treatment of women and men in education and health care, or that promotes involvement of women in economic and social development.
- To ensure that a commitment to gender equality is integrated into all partnership agreements.

## II. INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION

### Article 1 - Scope of application

The policy applies to all Acted staff and governance members.

1. The provisions of this policy may also be applied to any person employed by an entity that carries out missions for Acted.
2. In particular, this policy applies to implementing partners depending on specific clauses and conditions of the grant agreement, suppliers, sub-grantees, beneficiaries (as victims), stakeholders, consultants, and other associated entities.

### Article 2 – Definitions

1. **Gender:** Gender refers to the norms, beliefs and expectations that shape the social relations and roles and responsibilities of women and men, girls and boys. Gender norms are socially constructed rather than

biologically conditioned. They are attitudes and modes of behaviour, which vary over time and in relation to the society, family or individual in question. Beliefs about gender are learned over a lifetime and are often transmitted or reinforced through messaging from and within the political, social, economic and familial spheres. Because gender is learned, it can be “re-learned”, with damaging notions of masculinity and femininity reshaped, by actively cultivating and adopting positive alternatives.

2. **Gender Discrimination:** Gender discrimination occurs when women and men receive differential treatment on account of their gender. In such situations, one group may receive privileged access to resources, services, opportunities and decision-making capability over the same. Underlying this unequal treatment of the sexes is a system of power that is kept in place through rigid interpretations of the kinds of work that are acceptable for women and men to undertake and their ability to contribute meaningfully and lead in different aspects of public and private life.
3. **Gender Equality:** Gender equality means that women and men, boys and girls enjoy the same status in society and that they are afforded the same rights and opportunities, irrespective of their sex. Any attempt to create gender equality must be preceded by an in-depth understanding of the distribution of power in a given society, and the constraints faced by each sex in attempting to access and control resources and opportunities in the public and private domains. Programmes and policies which support gender equality are sensitive to the fact that, in most societies, women are at a disadvantage in relation to men because women lack decision making power. Such programmes challenge the unequal social relations that are at the heart of gender inequality and ensure that both sexes can take advantage of similar opportunities and shape the outcome of their lives.
4. **Gender Equity (sometimes referred to as “Affirmative Action”):** Gender equity means that women and men, girls and boys are treated fairly. In a society that promotes equity, fairness implies adapted treatment for each person. In contexts where gender injustice and inequitable power relations prevail, measures that seek to redress the social and historical inequalities and discrimination faced by women are sometimes required. For this reason, affirmative action may be necessary, to redress historical and perpetuating power imbalances, especially for women. Gender equity commands the recognition of women’s rights as human rights.
5. **Gender Gap:** The gender gap refers to the statistically verifiable inequalities that exist between women and men, in their ability to access, control and benefit from resources and opportunities. These inequities are revealed through the analysis of sex-disaggregated data, that can be used to design gender-sensitive programmes and policies.
6. **Gender Justice:** Gender justice refers to the collective responsibility to end inequality between women and men. In most societies, women have a subordinate status to men, a situation that is perpetuated and maintained by restrictions on their access to and control over resources, and institutionalised violence and discrimination that is levelled at women. A commitment to gender justice requires all citizens, but particularly duty bearers, to take a pro-active stance against gender-based violence and discrimination, and to protect and defend the rights of women, girls and marginalised groups.
7. **Gender Mainstreaming :** Gender mainstreaming refers to a process-oriented approach to gender equality work. The goal of this approach is to ensure that gender concerns are properly considered and addressed at all levels and in all areas of work. In this system, no programme or policy is considered “gender neutral”, and a concerted effort is made to introduce equality-producing measures in the different phases of the project cycle. An intervention that is sound from the point of view of gender, takes into account women and men’s differing needs and constraints in the assessment phase, in

programme and policy design, in resource mobilisation, in implementation, and in monitoring and evaluation. For gender mainstreaming to be effective, coherence must exist between the gendered goals and objectives of the intervention and the organisational culture and practices of the implementing parties or agencies.

8. **Gender Relations:** Gender relations refer to the complex and changing system of relations that underlie social interactions between women and men in a given context. They are significant because they reflect the cultural values of the group or society in question, the distribution of power between the two groups, and (often unspoken) rules about who is allowed to access material and non-material resources, and to enjoy the associated status and benefits of these.
9. **Gender Stereotypes:** Gender stereotypes are socially constructed attitudes and beliefs about the roles, responsibilities and inborn characteristics, talents and abilities of women and men, girls and boys. Such beliefs are learned over a long period of time and can be transmitted or reinforced by messaging from and within the political, social, economic and familial spheres. Gender stereotypes exert a significant enormous influence over the way we think and can impact people's decisions, behaviour, and ability to realise their full potential as human beings.
10. **Gender-Based Violence (GBV) :** Gender-based violence (GBV) is physical, emotional, psychological or economic violence that is inflicted on a person because of his or her sex. GBV tends to be uni-directional; this means that women and girls are more likely to be victims than men and boys on account of their low socio-economic status. However, men and boys can also be victims, when they find themselves in a position of diminished power vis-à-vis the perpetrator, or when their dress or behaviour veers significantly from culturally condoned expressions of masculinity.
11. **Women's Empowerment:** The concept of women's empowerment refers to a process of apprising women of the skills, abilities, resources and opportunities needed to shape the direction of their lives. Women's empowerment programmes focus on building women's capacities, their self-esteem and belief in their ability to control their lives and immediate environment. Such programs seek to "take back" the power that has historically been denied to women and to close the gender gap that is the result of centuries of social exclusion and oppression.

### Article 3 – Information and adherence to the policy

1. This policy is published under the authority of Acted. Acted staff, as well as the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, are required to conduct themselves in accordance with this policy and must therefore be aware and have understood of its provisions and of any changes. When they are unsure of how to proceed, they should seek the advice of a competent person, notably their line manager
2. Acted staff, as well as the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, who are responsible to negotiate the terms of conditions of employment of any Acted staff, must ensure that staff is aware of and commits to the full respect of this policy.
3. It is the responsibility of Acted staff with managerial responsibilities, as well as the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, to ensure that staff under their supervision comply with this policy; and to take or propose appropriate disciplinary measures as sanction against any violations of its provisions.

4. This policy shall form part of the working conditions of Acted staff and the conditions for the performance of the missions of the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy from the moment they certify that they have read it.
5. Acted will review the provisions of this policy at regular intervals.

### III. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

#### Article 4 – Neutrality

Acted staff and the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, must fulfil their duties in a neutral and apolitical manner, in accordance with the law, legitimate instructions and ethical rules relating to their roles.

#### Article 5 – Impartiality

In the context of their professional roles and/or their missions, Acted staff and the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, must act in accordance with the law and exercise their discretionary power in an impartial manner, taking into consideration only relevant circumstances into consideration.

#### Article 6 – Confidence of stakeholders

Acted staff and the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, have a duty to conduct themselves at all times in a way that reflects and upholds Acted's values of integrity, impartiality and efficiency and contribute to strengthen the confidence of all stakeholders.

#### Article 7 – Hierarchical responsibility

Acted staff report to their immediate line manager and/or the head of their functional department, unless otherwise provided for by law.

#### Article 8 – Confidentiality

Duly considering the stakeholders' potential right to access information, Acted staff and the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, must process all the information and all the documents acquired during or as part of the exercise of their duties with the necessary confidentiality.

#### Article 9 – Protection of privacy

All the necessary measures must be taken to ensure that the privacy of Acted staff and of the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, is appropriately respected; as a result, the declarations provided for this policy must remain confidential, unless otherwise provided for by law.



## Article 10 – Information held

1. Considering the general framework of international law regarding access to information held by private individuals, Acted staff and the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, should disclose information only in respect to the rules and requirements applicable to Acted.
2. Acted staff and the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, must take appropriate measures to guarantee the security and confidentiality of the information for which they are responsible or of which they are aware.
3. Acted staff and the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, must not seek access to information which would be inappropriate for them to have. Acted staff, as well as the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, must not make inappropriate use of the information they may obtain in or as part of the exercise of their duties.
4. In the same way, Acted staff and the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, must not retain professional information that may or should be legitimately circulated, or circulate information they know, or have reasonable grounds to believe, is inaccurate or misleading.

## Article 11 – Responsibility of line managers

1. Acted staff in charge of supervising or managing other Acted staff must do so in accordance with the policies and objectives of Acted. They are responsible for responding to acts and omissions of staff under their supervision who violate these policies and objectives, and to take due diligence measures expected from a person in their position to prevent such acts or omissions.
2. Acted staff tasked with supervising or managing other Acted staff must take the necessary measures to protect children and prevent staff under their supervision from engaging in acts likely to generate child ill-treatment or negligence. These measures may be: to draw attention to and implement the laws and regulations; to ensure adequate training related to child ill-treatment or negligence and to set an example of integrity through their personal conduct.

# IV. MECHANISMS TO ENSURE GENDER EQUALITY

## Article 12 – Importance of prevention of gender discrimination

1. Acted believes that gender discrimination can be most effectively avoided by creating an organisational culture which rejects and effectively acts upon any form of gender discrimination. Acted staff and the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, shall be sensitised to the importance of gender equality and the organisation's zero tolerance policy towards gender discrimination. To this end, Acted is training Acted staff in the Acted's Code of Conduct, this policy and specifically informing about the need to report any form of gender discrimination.

## Article 13 – Action to be taken in the event of gender discrimination

1. In line with Chapter One of Acted's Code of Conduct, which prohibits gender discrimination, harassment, or abuse, any cases of gender discrimination must be reported to Human Resources via the Grievance mechanism.
  - If any Acted staff believes that they are a victim of or witness to any act of gender discrimination, they shall have a direct contact with the perpetrator in order to end such behaviour in presence of a third party, provided that the facts are not too serious to exclude such an approach.
  - If the inappropriate behaviour does not cease or if the Acted staff is unable to address the perpetrator directly, they must report the facts in accordance with Acted's Grievance mechanism. It is advisable to note the day and time as well as details related to the facts and the names of any witnesses.
  - If appropriate, the line manager must also be informed of the facts, in order to take appropriate measures and to conduct an internal investigation in a timely manner.
2. ACTED acknowledges the specific vulnerabilities of women, girls, and boys to sexual exploitation and abuse. In this regard, Acted's Gender Policy may be closely linked with the organisation's Policy Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. In such cases, the mechanisms for prevention, identification, reporting, investigation, and sanctions for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse detailed in that policy may be activated by issues of gender discrimination.

## Article 14 – Sanctions against gender discrimination

### 1. Disciplinary sanction

The violation of the present policy, which constitutes a violation of Acted's Code of Conduct, may result in sanctions ranging from warning to termination of the employment contract for serious misconduct, with no notice and no payment of compensation.

### 2. Other sanctions

Acted reserves the right to use the full range of contractual sanctions, up to the termination of any contractual relationship, in the event of a breach of this policy by any entity referred to in Article 1 of this policy.

### 3. Reporting to competent authorities

Acted has the right, depending on the seriousness of the facts found, to report to the competent prosecution authorities the facts constituting gender discrimination.

## V. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

### Article 15 – Implementation of the policy

At the operational management level, The Human Resources Department is responsible for the independent oversight of gender and is responsible for its implementation within Acted.

At the organizational governance level, a dedicated 'Gender and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Committee', which is accountable to Acted's board, reviews on an annual basis the effectiveness of this gender policy, principles, standards and its implementation thereof.

This Gender Policy comes into effect after approval by Acted Board on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

## Article 16 – Adherence to the Policy

Acted staff and the other entities referred to in Article 1 of this policy, certify that they adhere to these principles by signing the Acted Policy Acceptance Form and/or by signing their employment contract.

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