



VAAN MUHIL TRUST

GENDER POLICY

Vaan Muhil Gender Policy is based on the premise that gender inequality is about unequal power relations between men and women. It provides a framework for removing this inequality and attempts to eradicate gender discriminatory attitudes and structures within the organization.

Understanding Gender: Perspectives

There are biologically constructed differences between the male and the female sex. The female sex is physically endowed with the ability to conceive and bear children, nurture them and the male sex contributes to conceiving but cannot give birth. While this sex difference is biologically and anatomically constructed, gender differences are socio-culturally constructed. Gender is distinction in roles, activities, behaviour, mental and emotional characteristics between females and males developed by a society. These differences are learnt through socialization processes by men and women and have been constructed and reinforced by socio-cultural, religious and economic institutions over time perpetuating discriminatory belief systems and attitudes. This leads to imbalanced positioning and inequalities among women and men. Gender is time and culture specific and changeable.

Gender issues are not the same as women's issues but are issues of women and men vis-à-vis each other. Both women and men suffer gender discrimination. Very often the focus is on women because of the unequal status they have in all spheres of society. Women have limited access to resources/assets and decision-making and thus are the worst victims of gender based discrimination and violence in a patriarchal society. The focus is also on men from the point of view of sensitizing them. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context, which cuts across castes, class, race, ethnicity and age divisions in society. Vaan Muhil adopts gender perspective, which means focusing on both women and men and their relationships with each other and resources.

The gender policy of Vaan Muhil comes from the understanding that inequality between men and women is deep rooted and is manifested in discrimination against women in different forms. It needs conscious and continuous efforts to achieve a balanced environment both at organizational level and also in work with the partners at the field level. The overall effort is to provide an enabling environment for women within the organization, various partners and the communities with whom Vaan Muhil works and strengthen the gender sensitivity among all.

The gender policy is an integral part of all its organizational policies, programs and projects and involves building a culture that understands the issues and policies, which respect diversity and gender related concerns.

Vaan Muhil will

- a) Ensure organizational commitment towards ensuring that gender is mainstreamed in the structure, procedures, policies and practices.
- b) Ensure that space and opportunities for learning, growing and contributing to organizational goals that are created equally for women and men at all levels.
- c) Ensure that all Vaan Muhil supported interventions create opportunities for women's empowerment and facilitate gender equality.
- d) Ensure that all programs implemented directly (capacity building) or facilitated or supported by Vaan Muhil mainstream gender at all the stages of analysis, planning, appraisal, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.
- e) To promote equal representation and participation of women in decision making at the professional/ programmatic and administrative levels.

DIVERSITY IN RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

- Vaan Muhil believes that the diversity of its staff contributes to excellence in its management. In order to obtain the full benefits of this diversity, Vaan Muhil will fully respect the dignity of all staff members, their beliefs, feelings, and private life, without distinction, exclusion, or preference based on race, national or social origin, religion, political affiliation, gender, or any other form of personal identity that could annul or alter equal opportunities or treatment at work.
- Vaan Muhil ensures equitable representation and participation of men and women in the core group, Board of trustees and in various functional committees of the organization
- Vaan Muhil recruits adequate women staff ensuring the balance at all levels; with an objective of achieving a numerical gender balance in all posts at all levels
- Vaan Muhil fosters a participatory environment in all aspects of its administrative activities in order to allow full expression of the views of all groups of staff especially women.
- Vaan Muhil encourages through its recruitment, compensation and professional advancement, the creation and development of a work environment oriented by the principles of gender and diversity, equity and pluralism.
- Vaan Muhil monitors the implementation of the gender and diversity staffing policies on a continuous basis in order to assess change and assure accountability.

ORGANISATIONAL SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES

- Vaan Muhil makes all HR systems and policies gender-sensitive and responsive, and integrating gender indicators into staff performance appraisal systems.
- Vaan Muhil incorporates and explicitly mentions gender sensitivity as an essential element in the tasks/job profiles in all terms of reference.
- Vaan Muhil initiates and builds the advocacy around gender balance and making efforts to integrate gender concerns into the scaling up and mainstream developmental programs.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- Vaan Muhil ensures equal wages to equal work for both men and women in the works as part of the programs.
- Vaan Muhil reviews the organizational structure, functioning, problems in relation to gender imbalances among staff and the work environment time to time and taking definite steps to address the same
- Vaan Muhil determines and creates opportunities for women that will best aid the staff member in increasing his/her skills and knowledge in preparation for advancement within the organization. Opportunities will include formal and informal training, attendance at conferences and workshops, project leadership, chairing committees, and special assignments to utilize unusual talents.
- Vaan Muhil facilitates staff capacity building processes and trainings to enhance perspectives and conceptual clarity on Gender issues (for all the staff members).

HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION

- All staff should be able to enjoy a working environment free from all forms of harassment and discrimination. Any conduct that fails to respect the dignity and feelings of another staff member is unacceptable.
- The organization prohibits any comment or conduct by any staff member, male or female, that reasonably could be viewed as sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is defined as unreciprocated and unwelcome comments, gestures or physical conduct of a sexual nature that are found personally offensive and that might create an intimidating working environment. It includes the transmittal or display of sexually offensive materials.
- Any staff member who feels that she has been harassed in any way or discriminated against for any reason should first discuss this with one of the ICC members. If the immediate superior is the alleged offender, the issue should be brought to the attention of

the next most superior officer. It is the immediate responsibility of that individual to clarify the circumstances with the complainant, document the complaint, and if appropriate, talk to the staff member about whom the complaint has been made. The complaint should be handled with strict confidentiality by all parties and, if possible, should be resolved by informal means as quickly as possible.

- If the complaint cannot be resolved informally (with the ICC member), the complainant should present her complaint in writing, addressed to the Executive Director. The formal written complaint should document the complete details surrounding the complaint (dates, time, nature of the behavior, actions taken to discourage the behavior, etc.), identify the alleged offender and any witnesses, and be signed and dated by the complainant.
- The formal complaint will be investigated within a fixed time frame by the Internal Compliance Committee (ICC). The panel will submit a written report and recommendations to the Executive Director. Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken, as warranted by the severity of the offense. Strict confidentiality will be maintained throughout the process and the privacy of those involved will be respected. All appropriate steps will be taken to ensure that no retaliation will be taken against any complainant or person who, in good faith, has participated in or provided information pertaining to an investigation, regardless of whether the complaint was upheld. No defamation will be allowed against an alleged offender. Claims made in bad faith may warrant disciplinary action.

WORK LIFE BALANCE

- Providing an enabling and friendly work environment where both men and women enjoy and actively participate in work. This includes providing flexible working hours and allowing working from home, wherever possible; Extending work related concessions and relaxations for women staff depending upon the situations and requirements; e.g. providing secure transport facilities when they work late hours; giving relaxation over travel time for the next day for those in the field; ensuring security measures along with minimum basic facilities for women staff traveling in the field.